It is What it is

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by karinakamichi

Summary

Under suggestion from Riza, Mustang brings Edward along on a mission of sorts. During the week that Edward is with them, he starts to have conflicting feelings about them, because he is reminded of his own parents. Soon, he finds himself more troubled than ever as he begins to desire the parental affection from them that he was depraved of at such an early age. || TW for Self-harm. This is based on personal experiences. Parental!Roy and Parental!Riza. Slow-build Royai and Edwin

Prologue

"Colonel Mustang, I need you to investigate a town around South City called Kreta. Maybe you've heard of it?" General Hakuro's voice said on the other end of the telephone. Roy didn't know what to think when hearing the orders at first. He had been there before, back when he was still a major and it wasn't a bad place at all.

"Yes, I have. What about it, sir?" He inquired.

"I see. Then that makes you the perfect candidate." Hakuro commented.

"Candidate?" Roy didn't particularly know if he liked the sound of that, especially coming from *him*.

"There are rumors spreading about Kreta conspiring against the military. There are even claims that point at the possibility of weapons of mass destruction... It's your job to get to the bottom of this matter. And even if those rumors end up being false, I still want a full week report on everything the town offers, alongside the overall finances, the people at large and other such things. A sort of maintenance report, if you will. But go in civilian clothing, it would bring too much unwanted suspicion to you if you went there in uniform, especially in the case that the rumors are not unfounded. Keep alchemy to a minimal as well, and make sure you use an alias. Got that, Colonel?"

"Understood, sir. I'll be on it right away." Roy said, even though he was pretty sure that the rumors led back to rants that got terribly distorted out of proportion. Perhaps, somebody had become a little too verbal with their feelings for some higher up's comfort level, so he himself had been sent to eradicate the supposed threat if need be.

However, Roy knew that people's frustrations towards the military for taking and destroying homes, and other such things were anything but unfounded. Most people had reasonable motives to detest the government.

Whatever the source of these rumors were, it must've really struck the nerve of *somebody.* Run an overly oppressive system and you're going to get protestors and a lot of people who disagree with both you and your logic. That's just how it works.

But Roy, of course, didn't dare point that out.

"Very well. I'll leave it to you then, Colonel."

"Right, sir."

"Oh, by the way, you better not dissapoint me. No repeat of Wisteria*, is that clear?" Hakuro added, an edge to his voice. (*reference to the town in The Valley of White Petals, the 3rd FMA novel.)

Roy inwardly flinched at the warning. Wisteria had been a town that Hakuro had ordered him to do a report on before. But Roy typically wasn't the type to do things like that himself, alongside the fact that he'd been held back with not only paperwork, but also people storming into his office and nagging at him right and left. He knew he couldn't get a moment's peace, not to mention he had no men available, so instead he'd requested Edward to do it for him since it wasn't too far out of his current way. (by requested, he, of course, meant threatening to cut off the boy's bank account and blackmailing him into going to the town to do the report for him). In the end, however, Edward had just shirked it back off onto him and led him to getting his head chewed out by Hakuro for lack of an actual report. (all Edward had wrote on the supposed report was "Regarding Wisteria, please look forward to a full report, coming soon!")

Of course, Roy had chewed Edward out for that.

He forced himself to smile. "I wouldn't dream of it, General."

"You better keep that stance." Hakuro said, before hanging up, leaving Roy scowling. However the bitter expression was quickly replaced with one of fond remniscense.

Riza, who had been standing at his side the whole time, took a moment to observe him, before speaking up. "Judging by your facial expression, I assume you enjoyed your time in Kreta, sir?"

While she hadn't heard everything, she'd caught most of it.

Roy glanced over his shoulder up at his Lieutenant, who, while expressionless as always, had carried the tone of somebody genuinely interested.

He gave a small smile of fondness. "Yeah, there were some really nice people there. Back when I was a major, the place seemed kind of like a vacation to me."

"Do you intend to investigate Kreta yourself?" Riza wanted to know. She wasn't over bearing about how Roy finished his work as long as it got done.

"Probably." Roy admitted. Had it been anywhere else, he would have definitely just got of his men to do it for him, regardless of what he told Hakuro, but the thought of going back to Kreta was actually appealing to him. Besides, it was much more enticing than messing with the mountain high stacks of paperwork on his desk that just kept getting taller. "Well, since it's orders, it's not like I really have a choice. I'd rather avoid getting my head chewed off by General Hakuro again at all costs."

However, Riza wasn't stupid. She recognized the look on his face. It was the look of him graciously using a mission as a excuse to avoid his paperwork. That's when she got an idea.

"Then perhaps I might make a suggestion, sir." She said, instead of saying she knew his true motives.

"What is it?" Roy inquired, curious as to her thoughts.

"I think you should take Major Elric with you." Riza said without hesitation.

"Fullmetal?" Roy's eyes widened ever so slightly. "Why?"

He didn't particularly like the prospect of bringing the teen along, but he also knew that Riza usually wasn't the type to come up with a suggestion without a good reasoning, so he decided to hear her out.

"As a Colonel, you have a responsibility to the welfare of your men, but, with all due respect, sir, I think you should also try to build a stronger connection to them, so you will always have people who will support you for more than just your rank in the end." Riza told him. In reality, there were more reasons than just that. She had noticed the occasional depressed looks on Edward's face in the cafeteria, when he seemed to think nobody was paying him any direct attention and she knew that something was wrong. If anything, the boy needed to get away for a little while and just relax.

"...You know," Roy gave a forlorn smile. "Hughes used to basically tell me the same thing."

Out of all of his men, Edward was arguably the one who hated him the most. Remembering Edward storming out of his office almost a week before, he couldn't help but ponder it, and feel the slightest pang of guilt. Even if he didn't want to admit it, he knew he was too harsh on the kid at times, considering his age. It was only because of Riza and, in the past, Hughes, who kept him straight, that he could see that he was undeniably in the wrong in those times.

Edward had never particularly liked him, and only seemed to hate him more each time they met. They butted heads a lot, and he wasn't particularly proud of it, but he doubted that trying to 'build a connection' with him would help at all. If anything, it was liable to have the total opposite effect and just make everything worse for both parties.

All that aside, there was also Alphonse, who'd built quite the reputation.

"I suppose walking around with a child *would* make me appear less suspicious. But what about his brother? As much as I like the kid, he's bound to draw suspicion and stand out too much, isn't he? With the reputation that Fullmetal and him have built up, it's very likely that somebody would probably recognize that Edward was from the military, just because there was a large suit of armor standing next to him..."

"You can leave that to me, sir." Riza said as if she had a plan, but offered him no explanation. "Also, if I may, I think it would be better this way, because Alphonse can't always be there to keep things cordial between you two. And since you're wanting to use this trip as an excuse to go off for a week instead of doing your paperwork, you should at least try to work out some of your differences with him while you're there."

"You're sharp." Roy noted, before looking at her with a more serious expression. "But if you don't mind, I'm going to ask that you come along in case I need backup."

"Understood." She said. Of course she knew he wasn't just referring to conspirists.

- End of Prologue

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A/N: I hope you guys like the premise, I will upload the first chapter when I get the chance. I hope my Riza and Roy seem in character...

Declaration

They'd been at this search for so long, yet Edward didn't feel like they had gotten any closer to anything. Every time they thought they had *something*, fate simply shoved them down another directionless path(if it didn't destroy them a bit first). He felt like he had reached a standstill, like his life was going nowhere and it was wearing on both his patience and his physical well-being, not to mention that his guilt was becoming more pressing with each passing day that Alphonse still didn't have his body back.

And if there was one major difference between Edward and Alphonse, it was that Alphonse had always been far better at dealing with his emotions and disappointment than Edward ever was, and Edward knew it. Sometimes, he wished he could be as strong and resilient as *him*. But he wasn't and that was just a fact.

"Try to not let it get you so down, Brother..." Alphonse cooed, trying to cheer up his brother as he noticed the melancholic expression on his face. They were headed back to Central, where Edward had plans to get a meal before finally crashing in his dorm. "We might have failed to find anything useful this time, but if we keep searching, I just *know* that we'll find a way to get our bodies back!"

Edward looked up at him, desperately wondering how he could be so positive. "You really think so...?"

"Of course I do." Alphonse reaffirmed.

Edward's eyes golden eyes shined slightly in the sunlight, before a small smile graced his lips. "Al..., you're always so hopeful, despite the odds... I can't help but wonder how you stay so optimistic sometimes, you know...?"

Alphonse was taken aback by the statement, feeling it to be a little out of character for Edward, but he decidedly spoke his thoughts anyway.

"Well, *somebody* has to do it, because *you're* too *cynical, Brother*."

"I am *not.*" Edward denied, pouting at the accusation.

"Yes, you are. For example, no matter who they are, you're always doubting people's motives." Alphonse pointed out.

"Yeah, that's because most people are full of crap." Edward reasoned, folding his arms.

"See? You're such a pessimist!" Alphonse couldn't help but want to laugh a little at Edward's defiance.

"Whatever... If it's the truth, then I shouldn't be made to feel bad for stating it." Edward muttered stubbornly.

"Ed...!" Alphonse scolded, before playfully pushing Edward on the flesh shoulder, causing him to flinch.

This didn't go unnoticed; Alphonse became concerned. "Oh, sorry...! Did I hurt you?"

"No, it's nothing like that." Edward grinned nervously, rubbing his shoulder, but not wanting his brother to feel guilty or worry. "My arm has just been a little sore is all."

"Did something happen to it?" Alphonse wanted to know.

"No, not really." Edward said. "I think I may have twisted it somehow or something."

It may have not been the best lie, but Alphonse seemed to believe him.

"I see..." Alphonse mumbled, before looking down and feeling a little guilty despite Edward's intentions to avoid making him feel that way. Alphonse was all too aware that he sometimes forgot to consider limits when it came to physical contact with others because of his lack of ability to feel. "Sorry..."

"Hey, it's not your fault, Al." Edward smiled, reached up, and gave Alphonse's armor a light pat on the head. "It's not like you could've known, after all."

"Mn..." Alphonse uttered, though still a little uncertain.

In truth, however, Edward was excluding the true details of why his arm was sore to the touch. The skin beneath his sleeve was covered from wrist to shoulder in cuts and scars that he had, in fact, inflicted upon himself. It was something he did when his emotions became too much to handle. Edward knew that nobody could understand, even *he himself* didn't entirely understand the reasoning behind it, so he didn't want Alphonse or anybody else to find out about them.

...

"Finally, now I'll be able to get some sleep...!" Edward walked into the grounds of Central HQ, his shoes dragging against the cobblestone, Alphonse following behind him. He let out a yawn. "I should probably go deliver my report to the Colonel... The bastard's probably gonna start barking at me over it being three days late, but I might as well go ahead and get it over with. What *else* can I lose...?"

Mustang had asked him to do a report on a town some ways outside of East City, (what was up with all the need for town reports lately, anyway?) but they had got side tracked, due to rumors of a famous alchemist residing in another nearby town, which didn't get them anywhere in the end). And then there was the fact that their train had got delayed. So the report was overdue.

As such, Edward was not particularly looking forward to seeing the man any time soon, especially not after storming out of his office and slamming the door the way he had a week before. Feeling his cuts itching, he briefly considered sneaking his way around to avoid meeting up with the man for a while. (His report was already three days late, what harm was

one more?) But he felt himself scowl immediately upon entering the doors, knowing his genius plan would be impossible now.

"Great, speak of the devil..." Edward muttered, spotting said man over by another door, speaking to an MP.

Roy was in civilian clothing, alongside Riza, who was standing beside him. It immediately struck them as a bit odd, as Edward and Alphonse noticed they had bags on their backs like they were planning on going somewhere. Edward's and Alphonse's presence didn't go unnoticed at all, as Roy looked up at them.

"Ah, Fullmetal, what a coincidence! Hello, Alphonse." he gave a grin that obviously spoke ulterior motives. Riza, who was standing beside him, granted a 'good evening' to both boys. However, while Alphonse returned the gesture, Edward ignored it, shooting a glare at Roy.

"Coincidence, my ass." Edward scoffed accusingly. "You were just *waiting* here for me, weren't you?"

"You know it." Roy didn't bother hiding it. His face grew a bit more serious at that moment. "So do you have the report?"

"Oh, yeah. Hold on." Edward sighed, after muttering something about Roy being a sudo-stalker. He kneeled down to open his briefcase, and began shuffling through numerous papers. He hadn't folded anything and instead had just crammed everything together in a pile. "Sorry, I've not really sorted my papers..."

If there was one thing that rang true about Edward Elric, it was that he was not a very organized person.

"I can see that." Roy smirked in amusement at the sight.

"Dammit... Where the hell is it...?" Edward fumbled through various items in the briefcase in frustration. He was so distracted by the large stack of papers and other things that he didn't even notice Riza holding a finger to her lips as she whispered something to Alphonse and handed him a note.

"Oh! Here it is!" Edward's golden eyes lit up a bit in relief as he located the papers he was looking for. Closing the briefcase he handed them to Roy.

Roy took them, briefly skimming over what the teen had written, before he looked back at him. "You really need to learn to organize your stuff better, kid. Because it shows in not only your daily life, but also in your reports and performance."

"Whatever," Edward glowered to the side. He hadn't come here for hear his disorganization to be jabbed at and rubbed in his face. "just be glad that I did the damn report in the first place..."

"Three days *late*." Roy reminded him. Edward muttered something incomprehensible beneath his breath, before changing the subject.

"So what's up? You guys goin somewhere or something?"

"I'm glad you asked." Roy smirked, giving Edward an uneasy feeling in the pit of his stomach. "What do you feel about a little vacation, Fullmetal? We've been sent to investigate a town outside of South City called Kreta for a report, and you're going to be coming with us." Roy excluded the fact about the rumors to avoid as much conflict as possible.

Immediately, warning signals went off in Edward's head, as he was reminded of Wisteria. "Nope. I respectfully decline. Al, we're going."

Edward had never really liked Roy all that much or more importantly, his way of doing things. Multiple times, he'd ended up in situations that were more trouble than they were worth because of him. And constantly being used as a guinea pig by him hurt Edward more than he was ever willing to admit, even to himself. Because, in actuality, there *were* times where he thought that he *could* like him, which wasn't something he ever wanted anybody to know, least of all Roy himself.

"Wait, brother, I think you should hear him out." Alphonse suggested. Edward looked at him, slightly hurt.

"But Al...! The last time that bastard sent me on one of his so-called 'vacations', I ended up getting caught in a bombing that could have gotten me and many others killed, or have you forgotten about Wisteria...?!"

"That wasn't the Colonel's fault, and you *know* it...!" Alphonse shouted.

"Major Elric, if I may," Riza interjected, right as Edward was about to say something. "I greatly apologize for the trouble that Colonel Mustang has put you through in the past. But I assure you that it would be well appreciated if you came and we would do everything in our power to protect you."

Riza was the type that had no problem with humbling herself in front of others if it was necessary.

She ignored the look that she received from Mustang.

"You can just call me Edward, you know." Edward said, giving a quirky smile. Being called 'Major Elric' had always caused him to feel a little awkward even if it was done with good intention. Maybe it was a reflection on his own mindset, because he wasn't particularly the most formal person himself at times. "And it's nothing against you, I just don't want to be stuck on a trip with *him* is all."

"Fullmetal is stubborn as ever, I see, but I'm afraid this isn't a choice. It's an order." Roy hadn't wanted to rope Edward into this any more than he wanted to rope himself into it, but he knew that Riza wouldn't be happy with him if he didn't at least *try*. But trying sometimes required a little force to push things in the right direction. And he himself, now that he had been put up to the challenge, couldn't help but feel a certain obligation to take Riza's suggestion to heart, as annoying and frustrating as Edward could be.

Riza wasn't impressed.

Instead of going through the trouble and humiliation of *asking* Edward to go with them, (to tell him that he was even *wanted* there), Roy just had went the easy route by ordering Edward to come. It was cheap manipulation tactics.

"What?!" the blonde snapped his head around to glare at his superior. "Screw you! You can't just go around using your status to push people around and get them to do what you want them to do!"

Riza briefly wondered if Edward was so reluctant to come along was because he felt unwanted. He may have been mature for his age in someways, but he still was just a child beneath it all. Yet, before she had time to form much of a thought on it, Roy spoke up again.

"Actually, I *can* and *will*, if see *fit*." He said as-a-matter-of-factly, offering a glare of his own. "If you don't like it, then quit the military. I'm sure you'd be able to find a way to access the resources you need and cover the funding for all those trips you're constantly going on. Not to mention your *hospital bills*."

Edward bit his lip in a foreboding manner, as if debating on whether or not he should argue back.

The atmosphere was tense at this point and everybody could tell that Roy was not in a good mood at all, so Alphonse and Riza got in between them.

"Colonel, try to calm down..." Riza uttered softly, trying to get Roy to back off before he could say or do something he'd *really* regret. Eventually, he sighed, but did as she wanted.

"Ed, I think it will be good for you to get away from everything for a little while." Alphonse said, still trying his best to get through to his Brother. "This is what you've been needing!"

Even if Alphonse sometimes didn't pick up on things that others did, he knew that Edward had been stressed lately, at least to a degree, so he wanted to help give his brother an opportunity to relax.

"Al..." Edward felt his resolve slipping at this point. He had been extremely exhausted and depressed lately, it was true, but for one, he didn't like the idea of a 'vacation' with Roy, and, more importantly, he just didn't feel comfortable with leaving Alphonse's side for an extended period of time in general. He'd grown used to having him by his side all these years. If wouldn't feel right. What made it worse was that he didn't trust Mustang at all to speak of, even if having Riza there would make things a little less stressful. "But... what about *you*...?"

"I'll be fine. Mrs. Riza offered me to help a lady here in Central look after some cats for her. I think it'll be a lot of fun." Alphonse explained, sounding a little excited. Alphonse loved cats, and there was something else nagging at the back of his mind. He knew that his suit of armor served as a constant reminder to Edward of the mistake they had made. For Edward, however, seeing the armor was probably unbearable at times, because of his guilt in feeling that he was the only one to blame for what happened. So Alphonse knew that if he could alleviate at least a bit of his brother's pain for a while, he would gladly do whatever it took.

Edward needed to get away from everything for a while. And based on what Riza had told him, there probably wasn't a huge threat of any sort, so that brought some relief.

But Edward wasn't happy at hearing what Alphonse said, certain that there was something suspicious about this whole scenario in trying to get him and his brother separated from each other.

"They bribed you?!" Edward pinched the bridge of his nose, trying to process everything that was going on.

"Hang on-" Riza started to say.

"No, it's nothing like that!" Alphonse insisted. "I *want* to do this!"

Edward sighed, but didn't have the heart to deny Alphonse something he was so excited and insistent about. However, he was still about to express his mind before Roy cut off his thought process by saying something that made him reevaluate the entire situation:

"Oh, Fullmetal, I should mention that your food and living expenses will be covered by us, *if* you're willing to cooperate, that is."

Edward was silent for a second, his ears perking up at the idea of getting free food.

"Why me specifically...?" He asked, a suspicious look on his face. "Why not just get one of your *other* dogs to go with you...?"

Roy decidedly didn't berate him for the 'dogs' comment, because something as simple as Edward inquiring anything about the mission was a huge step in the direction he wanted things to go. However, there *was* a saying; An eye for an eye.

"I have my reasons." He grinned, intentionally vague.

"Gee, thanks for the in-depth explanation, *chief*..." Edward muttered sarcastically, folding his arms.

Roy ignored his sarcasm. "Now I want you ready within an hour. Think of an alias you want to go by and get the bare minimal of things you need to bring with you. We'll be gone for about a week, so take that into consideration. Also, your red jacket, leave it behind."

"My jacket? *Why*?" Edward sounded a lot more worried than he had intended to let on. He felt his stomach churn a bit, as he felt everybody's eyes on him. He cursed himself, knowing that his defensiveness over his jacket had probably came off incredibly suspicious.

"People are liable to recognize you as the Fullmetal Alchemist just by your defining features as well as the alchemic cross on your back. It's better to avoid as much recognition as possible all together." Roy said, noticing the look on his face. He raised an eyebrow when Edward didn't respond. "Problem?"

"No..." Edward grumbled, a bit bitterly. As much of a pain as it was, he'd just have to wear a different jacket, even if he didn't particularly like it. Or... "You know, I could just use my

alchemy to-"

"Fullmetal." Roy said in a stern voice, cutting him off.

"*Fine*...!" Edward hissed, trotting off in the direction of the dorms, after picking up his briefcase. He sighed. He had at least wanted to keep his red jacket, as it was what he was used to and a sort of comfort mechanism at that point, but it looks like *that* wasn't happening. *Bastard Colonel*.

Edward was so focused on his irritation at Roy that he didn't even notice that Alphonse stayed behind to talk to him and Riza.

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A/N: Man, I really hope that this turned out well. I kept on re-writing certain scenes, because nothing sounded right. Please review or comment if you will. TwT;;;

Goal Setting

THIS CHAPTER WAS SO HARD FOR ME TO WRITE, I'M DYING! D''X

I hope it doesn't seem like I'm shorting Roy and Riza in it at all, because it's not my intentions. I swear I will have plenty of moments with them later that's devoted to just them. I just want to space out description. In the past, I think I've added too much detail, to the point it turned people off, so I'm making sure to be careful with my execution, and I hope my writing is making sense to my readers and the like.

(Also I hope that my Roy isn't too ooc. It's very hard to write him some times... Especially, the gentler aspect of his character.)

After Edward had turned down the corner, Alphonse faced Roy and Riza.

"Sorry..." He said, sheepishly rubbing the back of his armor head with his hand. "my brother can be a bit much at times."

"Seriously, kid, how do you put up with that...?" Roy sighed, questioning Alphonse's patience level. Dealing with Edward's attitude and smack talk had never been a irritant-free task for the Colonel himself, so he couldn't help but find a little respect for the younger brother.

Even if Riza didn't entirely agree with Roy's actions and way of handling the situation, she did understand that Edward had his own fair share of problems, so the fact that Alphonse had stayed so calm and level-headed about it all despite his young age was quite amazing.

"Well, he's not all that bad." Alphonse laughed a little. "Brother may act tough on the outside, but he's actually really sensitive when you get to know him. But also..."

He trailed off into silence, wanting to tell them about his brother's depressive behavior as of late, but didn't want to be an imposition.

"What is it?" Roy asked, noticing the hesitance in his voice.

"Well..." Alphonse trailed off into silence for a second. He had never disliked Roy, even if he did occationally disagree with his logic on things. *Both* Roy and Riza, for that matter, were people he considered important and even trusted. On top of that, they were two of the few that knew the full story behind Alphonse's suit of armor, so it made it a lot easier for him to come to them to talk about certain things if need be. "Brother has been kind of upset lately. I've been trying to get him to cheer up, but he's not really listening..."

"It does seem like something has been bothering him lately..." Riza said. Alphonse looked over at her. A part of him was relieved that he wasn't the only one that could tell Edward hadn't quite been himself.

"I..." he uttered in a low voice, Riza's and Roy's eyes on him. "I don't know what all is wrong, but I can tell he's not happy."

He could only guess an extent of what was upsetting his brother, and he wished Edward would talk to him more. But there were a lot of things he didn't talk about with anybody anyway, so it was hard to tell one way or another. He couldn't read Edward's mind, after all.

Roy and Riza could tell that there was probably a lot more to it than was being said as well. And for Alphonse to be so worried over it, it must be pretty serious.

Riza was about to speak, but it was surprisingly Roy who took the initiative.

"Don't worry, kid. We'll figure something out, alright?" he said, giving Alphonse's armor a light tap. Even though he had to tilt his head back, he gazed at him like a parent looking at a child. Of course, he wasn't aware of this, otherwise he would have denied it.

"Yes," Riza decided to add, giving a small smile. "you just enjoy yourself this week, Alphonse."

Alphonse was moved by the gesture, wanting more than anything to believe him, that they would be able to do something to help his brother. He said all he could think to, but it was no less genuine: "Thank you..."

"I should probably go after him for the time being though, in case he gets himself into trouble..." Alphonse said, a little awkwardly. Edward *had* seemed pretty angry when he had stormed off.

"Of course." Riza smirked a little.

As Alphonse began running off after his brother, she spoke up again:

"Those boys have really been through a lot..."

"Yeah, maybe this will actually do them some good... To take some time to themselves and just relax a bit." Roy's face turned a bit sullen. "*Heaven knows they need it.*"

"By the way," Riza offered him a bit of a glare. "mind explaining your *tactics* to get Edward to come along?"

Roy turned to face her, not really seeing a problem with his actions. He smirked. "The answer is simple, of course. At times, a little force is necessary to push things in the direction I need them to go in. Unless... You had a better suggestion?"

"Actually, I do." Riza said, meeting his eyes. "for starters, you could have told him you actually *wanted* him to come along, sir."

Roy felt something inside of him jolt, his eyes widening a bit. He was taken aback by the obvious advice. He had never been one for words, but, even if he wanted to deny it, he knew she was right. If Hughes had been there, he probably would have told him something similar.

In fact, he probably would have outright told Edward the whole story and why he was being taken along in the first place.

"You're right..." Roy looked away. "I'm sorry."

"With all due respect, I'm not the one you should be apologizing to, Colonel."

"I know..."

...

Edward was not happy. Not happy at all.

Only after he was back in his dorm room did he realize he'd fallen victim to bribery just as Alphonse had, and he wanted to punch Mustang more than ever.

Trotting across his room, he looked into his closet, snatching out a black jacket. It had brown fur-lining on the hood. He threw it on the bed, long enough for him to take off his red jacket. He winced, the fabric of his shirt rubbing against his cuts.

It was then that he realized Alphonse hadn't entered the room yet. "Al?"

Peeking his head out the door, he called out for him. "Hey, Al!"

Huh, I guess he'll be back here shortly, he figured, dismissing it momentarily.

Yet, a part of him couldn't help but wonder if Alphonse had already left.

He immediately found his aggression towards Mustang fading as he thought about how excited Alphonse had seemed over something as small and simple as the prospect of looking after cats.

It made Edward feel a little guilty. His brother should have been enjoying himself as a kid every day anyway, but instead, he was constantly having to come along on trips with him to find a way to get his body back - A body he shouldn't have even had to lose in the first place.

Edward had lost count of the number of times he'd wished he'd just accepted his mother's death instead of trying to play god and suggesting human transmutation. He recalled all the times Alphonse had expressed hesitation over their plans to try to bring her back, and how he himself had just shot him down, and essentially pressured him into it.

Edward still blamed himself for that and that wasn't going to change.

So maybe it was better he let it go. Alphonse deserved a week of fun to himself, even if the thought of being without him for a while was kind of painful.

After grabbing three pairs of clothes, Edward stepped into the bathroom, picking out several packs of bandage wrap, and a few other things before shoving it all into his briefcase. Opening the cabinet, he then reached into a box of razor blades, taking one out. When he originally started cutting, it was every few weeks at most, but as time passed, he began to

want to cut more and more, to the point he couldn't even go three days without facing bad urges. And since he had lost his previous razor blade on the trip back, he was glad to have one back in his posession. (He *would* use his automail blade, but the sound and light produced by the usage of alchemy wasn't something he particularly liked when he was trying to avoid getting caught.)

Staring at the tiny metal object, temptation began to consume his insincts. He felt his arm start to itch again, as he wanted more than anything to carve into his flesh, to see his blood, to just forget everything for a while.

Maybe just a few wouldn't hurt...

However, before he could even *start* to act on the compulsion, he heard Alphonse's armor clinking as he entered the dorm room. Startled, he jumped, quickly shoving the blade into his pocket.

Alphonse called out. "Brother, are you almost ready...?"

"Y-yeah, just give me a few minutes, alright?" Edward stammered, slowly regaining his composure. However, he cursed himself for stuttering, feeling his heart pounding in his chest.

I don't have time for this. I've got to finish getting around, he told himself, walking out of the bathroom.

What if he had went through with his urge? What would Alphonse do or think or say if had found out about the cutting? The thought terrified the blonde.

"Alright..." Alphonse said with a bit of uncertainty, wondering why Edward had been so startled.

As Edward made his way out of the bathroom, bringing his briefcase with him, Alphonse asked the question again. "Are you okay...?"

Edward couldn't bring himself to face him, but smiled none the less, even though it was fake. "Yeah, I'm fine... Though I am still a bit pissed at Mustang... That guy really knows how to push my buttons."

Despite the fact that they were words of hostility, most of the anger from before had left his voice.

"That looks good on you." Alphonse said.

"Huh?" Edward looked up at him, confused as to what he was talking about.

"The jacket." Alphonse pointed. Even though Edward's usual red jacket wasn't bad looking, it was always interesting seeing him in something different once in a while.

"Oh, thanks." Edward said, before sulking. "I do wish I could have worn the one I'm used to. But instead, *somebody* wanted to be a snide prick about it..."

Alphonse sighed a little, before giving his thoughts. "Ed, I think you should try to get along better with the Colonel... I'm sure there's more to this than what we're even aware of. And coming to terms with your differences or at least trying to might do you some good."

It was true, Roy's and Edward's antagonism towards each other had done far more bad than good and it was never really pleasant to be around.

"*You too*...?" Edward frowned a bit, but he sounded more tired than anything else. He looked away, a painfilled expression on his face. "Hughes once told me the same thing..."

Remembering the face of the man who'd become like a father figure to him and his brother before he was shot and killed, Alphonse didn't know how to respond.

...

"Alright... I guess I'll see you next week. Be nice, Brother!" Alphonse said. Edward was at the train station alongside Riza and Roy, about to board their train.

"No way." Edward gave a wry smirk, looking up at his brother. "That's *your* job, isn't it?"

"Ed...!" Alphonse laughed a little, playfully scolding him.

Using the back of his fist to lightly bumb Alphonse on the chest of his armor, he turned towards the door, offering a small wave. "See ya later, Al."

Roy and Riza who'd already said their goodbyes waited for Edward to get on. Once they were seated, Edward gave another wave as the train began to drive off. Standing up, he shouted out the window:

"Take good care of those cats, you hear me?!"

"You can count on me!" Alphonse gave a thumbs up.

Edward grinned a little, before sitting back down in his seat.

"I can tell that you two really are close to each other." Riza gave a small fond smile. Edward looked up at her, before he gazed out the window again.

"Yeah." he nodded, reminiscing. "It's not like we really have any other family, after all."

Of course, Riza knew that this was not entirely true; that Edward *did* have people who cared for him, like Winry and Pinako.

"It's only natural for siblings who face loss at such a young age as yours to grow attached to one another. It makes sense why each of you think the other is all you have left..." Riza said.

Before Edward could respond, Roy added to Riza's statement.

"Even so, you two do have family beyond yourselves, kid." If he had spoken any lower, they might have not heard him, or at least wouldn't have been able to make out what he had said.

Roy had his arms folded over his chest, but not in a condescending way. He had been listening to their conversation, deciding to then speak up.

Edward just then recalled that he was even there.

"No, I *don't*." He turned away, a bitter expression on his face. For one, he thought that Mustang was probably referring to Hohenheim and, secondly, Edward just didn't want to negoiate about *anything* with him.

Roy and Riza exchanged glances but neither of them pressed the matter further.

For a long time after that, the train ride was silent.

Eventually, Edward found himself gazing out the window towards some mountains that were off in the horizon. By this point, the sun had began to set, creating a vast aray of orange, purple and red. Briefly, he was reminded of his old home in Resembool, and the sunsets he would see there while walking alongside his mother. They had always been beautiful back then, and it wasn't something he could ever just forget. Even if it was something so small and seemingly irrelevant, it honestly had meant the world to him, just like his mother's stew.

Sometimes, the little things were harder to swallow than the big things, however ironic it may have seemed. It was moments like that, after all, that made him *want* to go back to those days.

However, no matter how lonely he and his brother got at times, their mother was gone for good, and there was no way to get her back. He had long since accepted that.

Eventually, he felt his eyes growing heavy, fatigue setting in, as he soon drifted off to sleep, the last thoughts on his mind being about his father's abandonment.

...

- End of Chapter

A/N: I hope it was good. I do still plan to have some really sweet moments between Roy and Riza coming up in a few chapters, by the way, so look forward to that. X3

Please give me feedback if you want. Even if it's something as small as "I'm looking forward to more.", it would be nice, but no pressure. The favs and follows are so well appreciated just as much! Thank you for all your support.

Only Human

Story: It is What it is, Chapter 3 - Only Human
Disclaimer: I don't own FMA.

(I feel so insecure about posting this chapter, but I'm going to do it anyway... T-T)

(((No Alphonse this chapter, but I'm not just gonna leave everybody hanging on what's going on on his end. It's just that I am mainly focusing on Edward for the time being. Also, there are a few Royai teasers in this chapter, so there's that. :D;;;))

(ALSO, if anybody is wondering, I've decided that this fanfiction is going to be sticking to Brotherhood canon(since I've spent so much time writing FMA 03 fanfictions, though I am probably using a bit of inspiration from both series.)

WARNING: THERE IS A TRIGGER WARNING FOR SELF-HARM NEAR THE END OF THIS CHAPTER.

That aside, I know that in this chapter at first glance Edward might seem to grow attached a little fast in, but I'm not going to have him be all huggy or anything with them right now, so it's not really, it's more just in his head and thoughts than in behaviors. And you may not believe me, but I grow attached to people really easily and fast at times (depending on who it is of course to a degree), but I get upset at the same time, because I'm afraid of them being turned off by me(a fear of abandonment, I believe that Edward would be afraid to grow attached to Roy or even Riza, and eventually he would realize that it was because he didn't want them to leave him the way Hohenheim did), and I'll obsessively wonder what they really think of me. I don't like being hated.) I have never had to roleplay mother, father, and child before, but I most certainly did have two people I saw as parental figures in my life.

I felt confliction because my real father is dead(he died when I was 11, but even before that I never really had the chance to grow attached to him, and I undeniably resent him a bit, because of some of the things my mom has told me. Though my father was flawed, and I do believe he loved me, but he wasn't capable of taking care of me and he and my mother were divorced. Though my mother hasn't been the most present in the emotional aspect of my life. (to be sadly frank, she's more like Dante from FMA 2003 at times), so while my situation isn't exactly the same, I'm basing what I wrote in this off a lot of my own experiences(only difference being that Edward DOES get his happy ending, unlike me), so please be mindful. While Edward is not going to have my exact thought process all the time, certain thoughts he has will mirror some of my own about certain experiences.

This is probably total crap, but I have been writing this chapter for about two days straight so I hope it turned out well.

...

"Edward, wake up." Edward awoke to Riza shaking him on the shoulder. Immediately, he flinched in pain, before he opened his eyes, squinting up at her and Roy.

"Huh...?" he uttered groggily.

"We're here. Come on." Roy said.

"Oh..." Edward yawned, getting up. "Alright, let me get my stuff."

He reached down, picking up his briefcase from underneath the seat, before following after them.

As they got off the train, he noticed it was dark out, a quarter-moon shining in the sky. Stars were twinkling.

"What time is it...?" he wondered aloud.

"I believe it's somewhere around 9 or 10." Riza mused. "Or at least that's the time we figured we would arrive."

"What are you guys doing here anyway...?" Edward wanted to know. "There's no way you're out here just to do a report."

"Of course not." Mustang didn't look back at him. "Apparently, there have been rumors of some military conspirists causing some trouble in Kreta, though I highly doubt there's any credance to it. We get these kind of claims all the time."

"Sorry, but I have a hard time believing you'd go through all the trouble of coming out here yourself, instead of just getting somebody else to do it *for* you. Sounds a little *fishy* to *me*, Colonel..." Edward didn't hesitate to state his doubts.

"If you must know, I'm here because I have some old friends in Kreta." Roy said. "So I thought it would be nice to pay them a visit while I'm at it."

"In reality, he just wanted to avoid his paperwork." Riza deadpanned.

"Oh, that's why...!" Edward snickered, everything piecing together.

"Hey, paperwork *isn't fun*, you know. And I *am* here for more than just *that*." Roy directed his statement more at Riza, trying to act as casual as possible, though not denying that part of it was true.

"Right..." Edward mocked, clearly not believing him.

He followed them into darker territory where the street lights faded out. He began to feel uneasy. "If this becomes a repeat of Wisteria, I swear I'm going to kill you..."

"Now, now, Fullmetal, no need to be rude. After all, you're getting free food and living expenses, aren't you?" Roy grinned, teasingly, as Riza turned on a flashlight. "You should be grateful."

"I was *manipulated* by you! Why the hell should I be grateful for that?!" Edward retorted, before changing the subject. "So where is this stupid town, anyway? As far as I can tell, there's nothing here."

"That's because we're not there yet. Give or take, we've still got about another twenty minutes of walking left before we get there."

"Great..." Edward groaned. He was still so tired. And since he'd forgotten to eat at the cafeteria, he'd been a whole day without eating, so his hunger pains certainly weren't helping him feel any better either.

"What's the matter?" Roy turned back, noticing him dragging behind. "Pick up the pace. We don't have all night."

"Easy for *you* to say..." Edward grumbled, feeling his legs dragging again as he struggled to keep up. "I bet you had a full meal before you left..."

"Maybe you should have thought about food while you were dawdling in your room." Roy said.

"It slipped my mind, okay?!" Edward glared.

"By the way, there are pit holes around here, so watch where you're-" Roy started to say, but was cut off midsentence by Edward.

"Ack!" The boy hissed, as his foot slipped into one of the said holes. He fell down, face first into the dirt below him. He clinched his fists.

"Gee, thanks for the warning!" he growled out, spitting out some dirt that had fallen into his mouth. Roy and Riza turned to see him struggling to get up.

"You should be watching where you're stepping with or without a warning. Don't get mad at me because you failed to keep an eye on your surroundings." Roy said simply.

"Hey, it's not my fault I can barely see anything back here!" Edward retorted.

"Well, perhaps you should have asked for a flashlight," Roy pointed out. "or stayed up here with the rest of us."

Edward's eyes widened a bit, before he looked away, muttering in a slightly pouty voice. "I didn't think you'd give me one..."

"Are you okay?" Riza held out a hand to Edward.

"Yeah, I think so. My leg hurts a little now, but I should be fine." Edward didn't take her hand, and instead proceeded to get up on his own.

"Here, try be more careful this time, okay?" Riza handed Edward a flashlight.

"Alright..." Edward muttered, before they started walking again. He began to make sure to watch where he was stepping after that, avoiding the occational pit holes in the ground.

Moments later, Roy handed him a snack bar.

"Huh?" Edward looked up, a bit surprised.

"Eat that. It may not be a lot, but it should keep you going for a little while."

"Oh..." Edward averted his gaze, bashfully. "thanks..."

"Don't mention it." Roy didn't look back at him.

The rest of the walk was mostly silent, before they finally reached their destination.

At first glance, it appeared to be rather large with numerous buildings and houses lining the streets. Yet, the town was only dimly lit, so it was hard to make out what all there was. Edward and Riza put up their flash lights, and that's when Roy spoke up at last.

"Follow my lead and remember what I said about aliases." he told them, barely above a whisper.

"Understood." Riza nodded.

Edward realized just then that he'd also forgot to decide on an alias. However, right as he started to debate on the matter, he stopped in his tracks, noticing a child standing beside a building a little ways away over, looking straight at him. From a distance, the boy seemed to be about the same age as him. He had white hair, a black hoodie and dark skin tight pants with short red boots. Yet despite his white hair, he didn't appear to be Ishvalan.

The boy appeared to be glaring, and Edward would be lying if he didn't find it a little irksome. *What's* his *problem?*

"What's wrong?" Riza asked, as she and Roy noticed he had stopped stopped walking. Roy turned to look back at Edward. The blonde glanced over at them for a moment, and then back at the spot where the other boy had been, which was now empty.

"No," Edward shook his head after a moment, before moving to catch up with them. "It's nothing."

If they had seen the child, they apparently hadn't found him to be a threat or anything of the sort.

Eventually, they entered a restaurant.

Aside from the round wooden tables, there was a bar up front where people could sit to eat. Behind it, stood a man wiping down the surface.

At hearing them come in, he smiled. His short curly hair shown bright orange and his light skin was covered by freckles. He appeared to be in his early thirties. "Good evening. We'll

soon be closing, so... Alistair?!"

The man's emerald eyes widened as if he had just seen a good friend he hadn't seen in years.

"Caspar! How've been you doing?" Roy grinned, approaching him.

"Good! What's it been? Ten years or so?" Caspar asked.

"Eleven or twelve, if I'm not mistaken. I happened to be in the town and decided to drop by. Hope you don't mind."

"No, not at all! I'm glad you did. It's been rather hectic for me lately, so it's nice to see an old face after so long."

Edward could tell that Riza probably felt just as lost as he did, but he almost felt bad for Caspar, because Roy was a huge charmer and good as hell at putting on an act.

"So, who are they?" Caspar inquired, referring to Edward and Riza.

"Call me Elizabeth." Riza said.

Edward just then realized again he'd forgot to come up with an alias. After a moment, Roy took the initiative.

"And this is Alfred." Roy introduced Edward with an alias he made up.

Alfred?! Edward wanted to sock Mustang in the face, for choosing an alias for him.

"Ohhh," Caspar looked at him with a mischevious look. "does that mean you finally got a girl friend?"

Before either Roy or Riza could respond, Edward smirked.

"As a matter of fact, they're *married*." he said.

Roy approached his side. "Yes, and this our *son*."

Edward choked on his spit.

Roy was satisfied at seeing the expression on the boy's face. He reached out, patting Edward on the head, grinning. "He's a rather troublesome one too sometimes."

Since Edward was... short for his age, it made the story believable without question.

"Just shut up, okay...?" Glaring off to the side, Edward cursed himself for not seeing it coming, and for running right into that trap.

Caspar laughed at little. "That's what kids are good for. But you can't help but love 'em. Man, I really am happy for you, Alastair. I always told you that you should find somebody. Let me know when you're ready to order."

"So how's your relationship with Cassie been going?" Roy asked, as the others sat up at the bar, followed by himself. Edward was sitting in between Riza and Roy. There were menus sitting at each of their places. Riza had opened hers and had began skimming over it, followed by Edward.

"...She and I broke up years ago." Caspar's eyes narrowed slightly. His tone was one of somebody who'd long since accepted things, even though their experience was still very painful.

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Did something happen?" Roy gazed at him.

"No, not really. One day, she just left with no real explanation... I think she may have just felt insecure about herself or maybe she got tired of me. It's a little hard from time to time, because I keep wishing she would come back to help look after our children and just to be by my side again, but I guess it can't be helped... And it's not all that bad, my kids mean the world to me, after all. Come to think of it, they're probably about your age, Alfred."

Edward looked up him. At hearing his story, a part of him couldn't help but be reminded of his mother, and all the years she'd spent waiting for Hohenheim to come back; All the years Alphonse and he himself had not only watched her suffer in waiting, but also the time they waited for him *theirselves*.

Catching the attention of everybody around him, he clinched his fists, slightly crinkling up the menu with his automail hand. "I'm sure it's painful going through that, but if she can't see what has before her, and she's turned her back on you when you need her the most..., then she isn't worth having around...!"

Edward bit his lip, letting his bangs shadow his eyes, his shoulders tense. Riza placed a hand on his back in a gentle manner, as a subtle gesture to get him to calm down. And after a moment, it worked. Edward began to relax at the touch, which had vaguely reminded him of his mother's. A warmth and calmness that he hadn't felt in so many years suddenly enveloped him.

"I can tell you've been through a lot." Caspar smiled sadly. "I don't know what all you've seen or exerienced and I won't ask. Breakups are hard to deal with sometimes. But just know this. Whether or not you're able to keep even a portion of a relationship with that specific person, there are always people around you who care whether you see it or not, kid. Why, right now, you've got two loving parents right *next* to you."

Immediately, the warmth was gone and Edward felt sick. Casper really didn't know anything at all. Riza and Roy weren't his parents, and Roy probably hated him. He shouldn't have been feeling happy about anything, because after the week was over, it would all be done with and irrelevant.

Riza could see the loneliness in Edward's eyes at the mention of parents, and figured that saying something at the moment would only make things more painful for him. She could never replace the mother that he had lost, after all.

"It's good to see you're moving forward with your life and taking a stance that some can't, Caspar." Roy spoke up, before Riza or Edward could say anything. He didn't want to make things any more awkward for Edward than they already were.

"It is hard sometimes, but I'm doing the best I can, you know...?" Caspar said.

"That's all we *can* do, really." Riza offered softly, barely above a whisper. There was a feint hint of sadness in her eyes as she continued. "When we face painful experiences... We often try to rationalize them, whether or not there's a logical reason for it. Yet, even though it doesn't necessarily make what happened in the past okay, I will always believe that we can work for a better future."

Roy know without a doubt what she was referring to.

The Ishvalan Massacre.

Perhaps it was an extreme event to compare to a relationship breakup, but for somebody who'd went through it first-hand, anything could serve of as a reminder to the hell that had taken place back then.

It wasn't something they could ever just forget about, after all. It was always in the back of their minds, plaguing both their waking moments and their nightmares. Likewise, it had left its fair share of scars in the hearts of so many people involved, on both sides.

Even though what happened in the past was wrong on all levels, however, they would keep going, and work so the same thing never had the chance to happen again. It was why she followed Roy, because they both believed in that same vision.

Roy nor Edward said anything.

"Yep. Take it a day at a time, I tell myself." Caspar smiled a bit, having no clue of the true thoughts going through their mind.

"I'm ready to order now, if that's okay." Riza then said, after smiling a bit.

"Of course." Caspar responded kindly, getting a piece of paper and a pen.

"I'd like to have one of your garden salads, a side of fruit and a couple deviled eggs. Sweet tea for the drink, please." Riza decided, not particularly in the mood for meat.

"Alright." Caspar nodded, before turning to look at Mustang.

"I'll have a pork cutlet, and a tomato basil soup. Sweet tea for me as well." Mustang said.

After writing down the two orders, he looked to Edward. "What about you, Alfred?"

When Edward didn't respond, Roy and Riza looked over at him.

"What's wrong?" Roy asked. Though the words were ones of concern, they were distant, and spoken in a cold tone.

"I don't want anything..." Edward muttered in a bitter voice. His anxiety was beginning to get to him again, especially after he had started to think about Hohenheim. Roy and Riza exchanged glances before Riza spoke up again.

"You need to eat something, even if it's just a little." She tried to encourage him. Even though Edward had eaten a granola bar, she knew it was better for him to have more on his stomach than just that.

After a minute, Edward gave in, his hunger getting the best of him.

"...Can I get a pork cutlet...?" he asked, before other choices came to mind. "Oh, some spaghetti, a baked potato with butter, a side of vegetable soup, a cheesecake, and a lemonade. No ice."

"Uh... Is he going to be able to eat all that?" Caspar looked at Roy and Riza with uncertainty. Before either of them could speak, Edward did.

"Hey, I may not look it, but I can stomache a *lot,* pal." He said, not particularly fond of being doubted. "Besides, other than the granola bar he gave me a little while ago, I haven't had anything to eat for about whole a day, because I had been traveling around with my- a buddy of mine and as soon as I got back, Dear ol' *Dad* here decided to blackmail me into coming along on this stupid trip." Edward pointed accusingly at Mustang.

Words couldn't express how odd and wierd calling Roy his dad felt.

"I gave you an hour's warning, you should have been ready long before then." Roy said, not seeing a problem, until Riza offered him a bit of a glare.

"Well, maybe you should have just left me home if you have such an issue with it!" Edward retorted beneath his breath. He wasn't particularly in the greatest of moods. "I still don't even know why you brought me here..."

"Hey, hey, no fighting." Caspar gave a quirky smile. "I'll start cooking this right away, alright? I'll be back shortly."

When Caspar stepped into a door in the back, Roy felt Riza's eyes on him. He knew that if he didn't tell his true feelings, Riza wouldn't let him live it down.

"I'm doing this because I felt like it..." He turned to look Edward straight in the face. "And whether or not you believe me is your own perogative, but I'm not doing this for some manipulative gain, nor to make myself look good. I brought you along simply because I *wanted to*."

Edward's eyes widened as he met his gaze. He swallowed a painful lump in his throat.

There was that feeling again...

A warm yet terribly painful yearning for a connection.

A connection that should never exist to begin with.

"Simple, huh...? I always thought you had it out for me, you bastard." He could only look away, pitifully, almost as if he felt guilty.

The one time he had hoped Roy really was using him somehow happened to be the one time his intentions were actually genuine. The irony was sadly hilarious.

"I don't hate you, if that's what you mean." Roy murmured.

Neither him nor Riza pressed for Edward to respond.

...

"Alright, here it is. Hope y'all enjoy." Caspar had finally finished making the food and brought it to them.

Upon reaching for the sharp knife placed in front of him to slice his pork cutlet, Edward became hypersensative to the cuts on his arm, feeling temptation rising again. But he forced himself to push back the urge just like earlier that day. He told himself he had to wait until later.

Decidedly, he turned his focus back to the food.

Riza and Roy began to eat theirs, but couldn't help but watch in some amusement as he started to gorge down his.

"Woah, you weren't kidding when you said you could stomach a lot, kid!" Caspar was amazed. Edward kept scoffing down one bite after another. It was like he was barely even chewing!

"People have nicknamed him the bottomless pit back at home." Roy offered.

"I can see why." Caspar laughed.

"It's always kind of amusing to see it in action." Riza added.

"Hey, I'm right *here*, you know!" Edward feigned a pout, not particularly liking his food habits being poked fun at, before he continued eating. He finished most of it within a matter of minutes, at least until he got to the vegetable soup, noticing the peas.

"Good job as always Caspar. You always were a great cook." Roy grinned, almost finished with his pork cutlet, noticing how it was perfectly tender, unlike in some places where the pork cutlets were too tough to even chew that well.

"Yes, I can tell you put a lot of effort into your meal preparation." Riza noted, after taking a bite of a deviled egg, looking down at the salad. Even something as simple as that, and Caspar had made sure the lettuce was finely chopped up, so it would be easier to stir in dressing, which simply wasn't something that most restaurants did. It showed that he had devotion to his work and that he was willing to take his time to make the customers happy.

"Well, thank you." Caspar blushed a little.

"If my *husband* could cook this well, I might would fall for him even more." Riza glanced to the side at Roy.

"Hey, I can cook!" Roy retorted defensively.

"By cooking, do you mean blowing up microwavable dinners?" Riza deadpanned. Roy stiffened. One day when everybody had been using the microwave in the breakroom back in Eastern Command, Roy had got the brilliant idea to rub it their faces that he could cook his food faster than the microwave by using his flames, and as a result, the bowl exploded, causing macaroni and cheese to go everywhere. Even today there was still resadue from it left behind.

Hughes, who was covered in cheese at the time, had patted him on the shoulder and told him, "Word of advice for the future, you should really rely on a microwave more often, Roy. Or better yet... get yourself a wife that's good at cooking, so she can do it for you."

"That was *one time*, okay?" Roy flushed in embarassment.

Edward began to snicker at the thought. If had been anywhere else, he would have asked for full details on it, but seeing as he could only guess why and how Roy had managed to blow up a table dinner, it somehow made it all the more hilarious.

"No offense, honey, but you're useless in the kitchen." Riza said flatly, finishing her egg.

Even though there weren't any ill intentions behind it, Roy began to sulk. "Well, that was harsh..."

Yet part of him knew it was true. Making complex meals simply wasn't his forte. He was far better with making deductions, logical reasoning and giving orders, not house work or meal prep.

"It's okay, *Dad*." Edward chimed in, giving a small grin. "We all have things we aren't good at."

He immediately recieved a glare from Mustang.

"What are you doing?" Riza asked, noticing that Edward had got a paper towel and was slowly picking at his vegetable soup. Some peas sat on the paper towel.

Edward looked back up at her, before returning his gaze to his paper towel.

"I'm picking out the peas." He explained.

"Eat them." Roy told him, a bit sternly. "They're good for you."

"I don't want to. I hate them." Edward muttered.

"There aren't even that many."

"I don't care. Peas make me sick." Edward glared daggers at the tiny green vegetables. Roy sighed, about to say something else, but Caspar spoke up, smiling at Edward, before Roy could continue. "It's okay, just between you and me, I can't stand them either."

"See...!" Edward smirked, looking triumphant.

"Back me up here, Elizabeth!" Roy looked to Riza.

"Sorry, but I'm on their side." Riza looked away.

"Well, gee... Thanks for the support..." Roy heaved another sigh, feeling like he was the only one who liked peas. It was ironic considering how much Edward liked food, and how much Riza and Caspar enjoyed cooking.

"Don't mention it." Riza said.

"So how's business been lately?" Roy asked, as he began to use his spoon to take sips of the Tomato basil soup.

"It's been kind of slow lately." Caspar answered. "People keep telling me I should get a different job, but cooking is my life, and seeing the smiles of the people who do still come in here... it makes me happier than any other job could. I couldn't just tear myself away from that, you know?"

"Never let others tell you how you should live your life. If it's what makes you happy and you're fortunate enough to have the choice to choose, then don't let that opportunity go to waste." Roy told him. "Are Luci and Danyon still working here?"

"Yeah, they are." Caspar said. "But Luci has been kind of sick lately, and Danyon had to leave early."

"I see. I'll have to stop by again tomorrow and at least say hello to Danyon." Roy said.

"You definitely should. I'm sure he'd love to see you." Caspar replied.

"Alas, we're going to have to leave soon, for tonight, because we need to rent an inn room." Mustang started to get up.

"What are you talking about? Don't go and waste your money one of those expensive rooms. A good friend of mine is out of town and I'm sure he wouldn't mind you staying there for a week or so."

"No, we couldn't..." Roy tried to passively wave off the offer.

"I *insist*. It's not that far from here, and I'm about to close up shop anyway, so I don't mind driving you down there. Just give me a few minutes, alright?"

"Well, if you're sure, we'd really appreciate it." Roy smiled politely.

It wasn't that much longer before everybody had finished their meals and Roy payed the bill. Soon after, Caspar wiped down the bar and tables, locking the door and then led them out to his car.

"I really am glad you could visit, Alistair. It's good to see you're doing well." Caspar said to Roy after everybody had got in the car and he was driving down the road.

"And you as well." Roy said.

"So what brought you out here, if you don't mind me asking?"

"Things were becoming a bit hectic at home, you see, so I figured I might as well come out here to get away for a while." Roy gave half of the truth.

"Well, whatever the reason, you're always welcome here." Caspar grinned. "Your wife and kid too."

Roy returned the gesture. "Thanks, Caspar."

"Ah, it's no problem. That's what friends are for, right?"

Soon, Caspar pulled into a drive way. From the outside, or what they could make out, it looked to be a fairly decent sized house.

"Now, I do have two warnings," Caspar told them, opening the car door. "There's only one bedroom, but the guy has four beds, so you should be fine. Also, there's not really a lot of food around here, so you'll probably have to go to the store down the road to get some."

"Understood." Roy said, as he followed Caspar up onto the porch, alongside the others.

Reaching into his pocket, Caspar pulled out a key, sticking it into the key hole to unlock the front door.

After turning on the lights, and briefly looking around the house, he handed the key to Riza, who was closest to him. She thanked him.

"I don't want to keep you all awake, so I'll go ahead and leave. But if you have a problem or question, just call me. It's the same number as it's always been." Caspar gave Roy a light pat on the shoulder as he passed by him. "Now, I have to get back to make sure my kids haven't got themselves into trouble."

"Your help has been most appreciated, Caspar." Roy said politely.

"Yeah, thanks, pops." Edward echoed with a grin, waving.

Riza simply gave a light bow of her head.

"Hey, come back by sometime if you can." Caspar offered a wave as he headed back to his car.

"Of course." Riza said.

"Will do." Roy smirked, before following the others into the house, closing the door behind him.

When they reached the bedroom, Edward immediately kicked off his shoes, threw down his briefcase and plopped down on the bed, which was slightly unkempt. "Finally. A warm soft bed. Maybe I can actually get some rest now, as long as *somebody* doesn't decide he's going to leave as soon as we got here."

It was obvious that he was referring to Roy. However, Roy surprisingly ignored his statement.

"Aren't you going to change first or something?" He asked him, even though he wasn't that interested.

"Not right now, I'm too tired." Edward murmured. However, while it was true that he was tired, exhausted in fact, now that he was in bed, he ironically felt restless. Something inside of him even began to feel guilty for having eaten anything that night, which was a thought that occationally bothered him after eating meals. Alphonse was stuck without a body and couldn't consume or taste anything. But Edward didn't have that problem and could eat as much as he wanted, he could enjoy meals. Yet he knew that he had no choice. If he stopped eating, he wouldn't be in shape to do research, or to fight back against enemies. He knew that he had to eat to stay strong and healthy, for Alphonse.

But even then, it didn't stop the guilt. Aside from that, in one single day of being around Roy and Riza, a small part of him had began to long for things that he'd given up along with his home back in Resembool. As much as he wanted to avoid thinking about it, his time with them had been enjoyable to a degree.

Even small things like Roy trying to get him to eat his peas mirrored things like Trisha and others trying to get him to drink his milk. As such, the days events had been an endless reminder of the past he'd left behind.

The past that he wasn't supposed to ever go back to.

Roy's words to him continually echoed in his head.

"I'm doing this because I felt like it. And whether or not you believe me is your own perogative, but I'm not doing this for some manipulative gain, nor to make myself look good. I brought you along simply because I wanted *to."*

What had he meant by that? Surely, it was just an act.

But Edward knew it was not. Yet he just didn't want to believe it, because it would be a threat to the barriers he'd built around his heart.

He wasn't supposed to grow attached...!

But watching Roy and Riza banter over cooking and paperwork and occationally joining in himself had made him laugh for real.

The rare moment that Roy had shown him kindness of any sort had made him desire a connection with him.

The moment that Riza had rubbed his back had genuinely put him at ease at least for a little while.

Seeing a different side to Riza and Roy than he was used to had made him want to get closer to them.

And posing as their son had made a small part of him want it to be true.

What made it so painful was that the cherade wasn't meant to last. After the week was over, it wouldn't even matter any more. Roy would go back to barely sparing him a single glance, and both him and Riza would hardly even act like it even happened.

But, despite himself, he *wanted* it to last.

He couldn't believe just how impressionable he really was in the end. Just one day and it had the ability to make him feel like this. It made him sick.

He was even weaker than he thought he was.

He started to find himself hating Hohenheim more than ever. If he had stayed, Edward was sure that he wouldn't have been feeling the confliction that he was at the moment.

He remembered all the times he'd wondered what it could have been like to have a normal father that hadn't ran off on his family.

Yet then he remembered all the times Trisha had looked so sad when the man was mentioned.

Feeling his mother's hand grow limp in his.

In the end, even more than Hohenheim, he hated himself more than anything for being unable to help or save her when it came down to it.

And his mother wasn't the only one he'd failed to save.

There was Nina too.

All of that was aside from the suffering Alphonse had had to go through because of him.

Perhaps, it was the mix of both fatigue and restlessness getting to him, disquietude driving his thoughts in a million different directions, but he couldn't stop the way he was feeling. His arms were starting to itch again, anxiety consuming him, and he knew he wouldn't be able to sleep until he was able to release his pent up frustration. So, when he felt that nobody was looking, he grabbed one of the packs of bandage wrap, a black long sleeve shirt and a pair of

beige nylon shorts from his briefcase, and headed straight to the bathroom. Once inside, he locked the door behind him and turned on the lights.

Just a *few*.

He needed at least a few.

Heading to the sink, he took off his jacket and shirt, taking the razor blade out of his pocket. The metal of the blade glistened in the light. Holding his arm over the sink, he dragged the tip of the tiny weapon across his skin. The all too familiar stinging sensation set in, giving him a slight rush. He hadn't cut in a while, so finally getting back to it offered some level of comfort alone.

As blood oozed from the slit, he wondered briefly what Roy and Riza would think if they found out. They would most certainly be disappointed in him, especially Roy.

Alphonse definitely wouldn't be happy either and would be upset with him for not relying on him, Izumi would be pissed about it, and might even beat the hell out of him, and Winry would be hurt bad by it, and would probably cry if she found out. Even so, he couldn't bring himself to ignore the urge anymore.

After all, it wasn't like they could ever understand.

It was a way of distraction, yet a way to *feel* at the same time. He didn't have to think that much when he was focusing on the pain. Euphoria was the best way to describe it.

It was addictive - the sting, the feeling of dragging the razor over his skin, the sensation of being in control that it offered, as well as the blood. *Especially* the blood.

Watching the crimson flowing down his arm, it was like an alternative to crying and letting his emotions out that he couldn't explain and it never failed to entrance him.

And the things he didn't even know how to or want to verbalize didn't have to be expressed through words, because advocating through the blade was much easier and required a lot less effort anyway.

He slashed again and again, the notion of 'just a few' quickly turning into dozens. Blood had covered his arm flowing down into the sink. A few of the cuts were a little deeper than intended, but not deep enough for him to worry about.

Finally after a while, a bit lightheaded at that point, he stopped, his arm feeling weak. He turned on the water, rinsing out the sink and off his arm, hissing at the pain. Some of the blood had dried, so he decidedly left those parts alone. Afterwards, he opened up his bandage wrap.

It was at that moment that there was a knock on the door. He stiffened as Roy's voice spoke from outside the room:

"Fullmetal, are you almost done? You've been in there for about an hour. "

A whole hour?

"...Yeah, I'll be out a minute." Edward said, lacking his usual snarkiness.

"Hurry it up, You not the only one here, you know."

"I said I'll be out in a minute, okay?! Don't rush me...!" Edward grumbled, as he fumbled to get the bandage wrap around his arm. After tucking the end of the wrap underneath another part of it, he washed off his blade, before slowly working his black long sleeve shirt on, hissing a bit and he changed into the shorts. The sleeves of the shirt were long and baggy enough to hide his bandages.

Sticking the razor blade back into his pocket, he picked up his jacket, as well as his other clothes, and exited the room. He passed by Roy with a scowl. "There, are you *happy* now?"

"Very much so. Thank you." Roy said in an irritated tone, glaring a bit, before going into the bathroom.

Edward came into the bedroom, noticing that the bedding had been replaced. However, he payed it no mind, and laid down anyway, throwing down his clothes beside his bed.

"Edward," Riza, who had noticed him come in, sat down on his bedside a minute later, catching his attention. "do you mind if I ask you something?"

"What is it?" Edward drawled, tiredly glancing up at her.

Riza was silent for a moment, as she thought of a way to word her question without sounding too intrusive or insensitive. She doubted that Edward would really open up to her, but she had to ask anyway. Her mind wouldn't rest in ease until she at least tried. "Earlier..., when you got upset, and started talking about Caspar's ex turning her back on him, were you... thinking about your father?"

"That *bastard* is *not* my father." Edward said, bitterly, speaking in a tone that Riza rarely ever heard from him. It was filled with sheer pain and resentment. And she could tell that even then, he was holding back. "He ditched us with hardly a glance... And Mom was always suffering because of him. She spent all that time waiting for him until she was on her death bed, yet he didn't even come to her funeral."

He clinched his fists. "Al may be able to forgive him, but I can't, not after everything he put us through."

"Do you... ever wish you could have had a normal relationship with him...?" Riza wanted to know.

Edward was silent for a moment in question, thinking about the same thing he had earlier.

Despite how much he hated Hohenheim, he admittedly didn't remember him all that well, so a certain part of him wondered what it could have been like if he had a chance to build a connection with him, how things would have been like if Hohenheim hadn't turned his back

on his family. A certain part of him couldn't help but wish that he and his brother could have had a normal relationship with him, just like they had had with their mother until she died.

Even if he had came back at some point, he would have accepted him with open arms in the end if it meant his mother's happiness, but he knew it was too late for that. His mother was long gone, so if he came back and tried to forge a bond with him or his brother *now*, it would never, for an instant, be as close as it could have been otherwise.

"Well..., sometimes I wonder what it could have been like if he'd stuck around. There are even times that I don't *want* to hate him, but he knew how Mom felt... How *we* felt... We *needed* him more than anything, and he left anyway. Nothing can *ever* make that okay..."

Riza she reached over, pulling a few loose strands of hair out of Edward's face. "I imagine that processing abandonment must be very painful to go through, especially when it's somebody you wanted to trust... Somebody you should have been able to look to for support... I'm sure it gets lonely..."

She looked away. She didn't understand everything Edward was going through from personal experience, because she hadn't been abandoned. But she had lost her mother at a young age, and that had been hard *enough* to understand, especially since she was so young at the time.

Edward didn't respond, which gave her the answer she needed.

Roy had exited the bathroom and had been standing near the door to hear most of their conversation.

He was in a similar situation to Riza. His parents had died when he was very young, but he had been fortunate enough to be taken in and rasied by his paternal aunt(Madame Christmas). Yet, often, the question still arose in his mind: *What could it have been like? What if they had been by my side to this day?*

However, he had never been one for comforting others, so he decided to stay quiet.

"There's nothing I can say that will make what happened okay, and I couldn't even *begin* to imagine all the struggles that you and Alphonse have had to face throughout your life." Riza gave Edward a reassuring smile, before continuing. "But..., even though it may not seem like it, you two do have a family, even if it isn't through blood relations."

Just then, Edward felt a pain in his chest. But he smiled lightly, telling himself to not believe her. "Thanks... *Mom*..."

However, his voice cracked and there was a lump in his throat because he *needed* to cry. It was so painstakingly obvious to both Roy and Riza, but Edward refused to let it out.

Riza gave a pained smile, before exchanging a glance with Roy, who's usual calm and collected eyes were disheartened and tortured. He obviously wanted to do something, but there was nothing he felt he could do without making it worse.

It wasn't long before Edward surprisingly felt himself drift off to sleep.

"When it comes down to it, it's easy to forget that he's still just a kid..." Roy mumbled after some time, gazing over at Edward's sleeping face which looked uncharacteristically innocent.

"Yes, it is." Riza murmured. "But in the end, both he and his brother are... they're only..."

"Human. Just like us." Roy finished the sentence for her, as he gave a sad smile after a moment, before he looked back up at her. "Good night, Hawkeye."

Riza gave a sly smirk. "Good night..., *Alastair*."

"Hey, since we're gonna be husband and wife this week, how about a little kiss?"

"Go to bed, sir."

...

A/N: ROYAI FTW. XD

I hope this angsty shit fest chapter is satisfying to the readers.

I tried my best, but this took me forever.

Rumors

The next morning, Riza opened her eyes, squinting at the sunlight flooding into the room. After getting up, her hair slightly tousled, she headed to the kitchen.

"Good morning, beautiful."

She looked up to see Roy sitting at a black table, leaning his elbow on its surface. He was resting his head in the palm of his hand, grinning at her like a fool. Three cups sat in front of him, and a kettle of coffee was in the middle of the table. It was obvious he wanted her to drink it with him.

"What are you doing?" Riza asked, slightly unamused, but poured herself a cup of coffee anyway.

"I'm playing the role of a husband. So how's my acting been?" Roy wanted to know. It was clear that he was having a fun time with this charade, perhaps a little *too* much fun.

"It's good." Riza said after taking a sip of coffee, sitting down at the table.

"Why thank you. I've put a lot a lot of thought and effort into it." Roy smiled, proudly.

"I meant the coffee." Riza told him impassively as she averted her gaze, causing Roy's wall of confidence to crack just a little(not really). "You can actually make something, after all."

"I told you I'm not *that* bad in the kitchen. It just so happens that I'm better at other things. Besides, you always make me cups of coffee when I request it. I figured I'd at least repay you for *one* of those cups." Roy admitted, wanting her to know that she was appreciated by him.

Riza gave a small smile in response, undeniably charmed by the gesture. "Thank you, sir."

"I walked down the road to the market and got some groceries, since we're gonna be here for a week and all." Roy told her.

"I see." Riza mused.

"So are we gonna eat out again, or are we going to make something?" Roy inquired for Riza's thoughts.

"Did you get eggs?" She asked.

"Yeah."

"Mayonnaise?"

"No... Why...?" Roy was confused.

"Go get it." Riza told him. "Salt, vinegar and mustard too, if they don't have any of that here. I'll make deviled eggs if you get the ingredients."

"Why not just scrambled eggs?" Roy asked, not wanting to go out again just to get some ingredients if he could help it. However, the expectant look on Riza's face made him give in. "Alright, I'm almost done with my coffee anyway. I'll be back in a little while. The eggs are in the fridge in case you want to go ahead and start boiling them."

In truth, Caspar's deviled eggs had given Riza the craving for more. She would have went to get the stuff herself, but she didn't know where the market was, so she figured it would just be more convenient for Roy to do it.

...

Edward woke up in cold sweats, gazing around the bedroom to notice that Riza and Roy had both already got up. He didn't really feel the greatest and his arm hurt like hell to move, but he forced himself to get up anyway, his hair unkempt and flowing down to his shoulders. He headed straight to the bathroom, deciding he didn't feel like bothering to change clothes for the time being.

Locking the door behind him, he slipped off his shirt. Blood had dried into the bandage wrap, sticking to his arm. Slowly, he began to pull it off, hissing as several of the cuts reopened. However, eventually he caved in and turned on the water, Running his arm underneath the sink, he was able to take it off easier.

He was never a fan of wearing bandage wrap for a long period of time, because it was uncomfortable, and irritated his cuts, causing them to itch even more than without it. He only wore the bandage wrap when there was an immediate need. Fortunately, the bleeding didn't appear to be that profuse at this point, so he figured it would be fine to go without it. He threw it in the trash, dabbing at the bleeding spots with some toilet paper until he figured it was calmed down enough. Afterwards, he slipped his shirt back on, before then stepping out of the bathroom.

It wasn't long after Riza had turned on the stove and started to boil the eggs that Edward came traipsing in.

"Good morning, Edward." Riza said.

"Mornin'..." Edward mumbled, sitting at the table, before realizing that he hadn't seen Roy yet that morning. "Where's Mustang...?"

"He's gone off to get some ingredients at a market that I asked him to get." Riza explained. "He should be back shortly. Feel free to help yourself to the coffee on the table in the meantime."

"Alright..." Edward looked down to see an empty cup on the table. "Is this cup clean?"

"Yes, the Colonel left that one there for you." Riza replied.

"Okay, thanks." Edward said, reaching out and grabbing the kettle to poor some of the coffee into the cup.

For a long time, the room was silent, as Riza occasionally got up to check the timer.

Finally about ten minutes later, Roy came in, holding some bags. "Alright, here's the stuff you asked for, *dear*."

"Thank you. Set them over there on the counter top, if you will." Riza said, getting up. After Roy did as asked, Riza got out the ingredients out of the bag, throwing the bag into the trash.

"Ah, Fullmetal, you're awake." Roy noted, noticing Edward sitting at the table.

"Mornin', *Dad*." Edward grinned. If he was gonna be stuck with playing the role for a week, he might as well have a little fun with it, or as much fun as he could have, all things considered. A small part of him felt a little pained a joking about it, however. He almost wished he could be saying it for real.

"Mornin', kid." Roy lightly ruffled his hair, giving a wry smirk. Edward couldn't deny that Roy's response brought him a little happiness, but also surprise.

"Everybody's really enjoying taking advantage of this family act." Riza mused, as she turned off the stove in response to the timer going off. Edward was unable to bring himself to say anything in response.

"I *was* initially prepared to choke Fullmetal when he volunteered us as husband and wife, but now I'm a little appreciative because I get to tease you all I want for a whole week." Roy smirked.

"Tease me too much and you're liable to get the boot." Riza said nonchalantly.

"Oh, come on, *Elizabeth*. You should try to loosen up a *little*. I wouldn't *actually* do anything to you..., unless you wanted me to, of course."

"Good, because I *want* you to help me prepare this food."

"Oh?" Roy rose an eyebrow. "And here I thought I was 'useless' in the kitchen?"

"If you can follow directions to go get things from the store, and were capable enough to make coffee, you should be fine."

Edward once again felt a certain happiness consuming him as he watched the two playfully banter. Down deep, he wanted it to stay this way, but knew it couldn't.

That's when he realized something.

"Wait, the Colonel made this?!" he exclaimed, surprised.

"Of *course* I did." Roy said, as a matter-of-factly.

"Well, that's surprising. I thought you'd blow up the kettle." Edward muttered, teasingly.

"Just shut up, I *can* do *some* things, okay?" Roy retorted, flustered, before turning back to Riza.

"So what do you need my help with?" he asked, after washing his hands. Edward smirked, choicefully not saying anything.

"I need you to find a bowl, a knife and two tea spoons", Riza told him, draining the hot water, refilling it with cold water several times.

Roy found what she needed, bringing it over as she was beginning to crack and peel the shells off of the eggs. She started putting the eggs onto a paper towel.

"Now I want you to get a teaspoon of vinegar, twelve teaspoons of mayonnaise, 1/8 a teaspoon of salt, and one teaspoon of mustard, and mix it all into the bowl." Riza said. At seeing the knife, Edward began to feel uncomfortable.

"Um..." he uttered, suddenly feeling like there was a lump in his throat.

"Hm?"

"What is it?"

Roy and Riza looked over at him as he spoke.

"Do you... Is there anything I can do to help?" Edward fumbled over his words, awkwardly. He scratched his arm sheepishly. After all the hospitality and kindness they had shown him, he couldn't just go without trying to repay at least some of it. "I don't feel really right doing nothing."

"Hm..., alright." Riza thought for a moment, her finger on her chin. "How about setting the table for us?"

"Sure thing." Edward smiled, as he got up. That's when he remembered how his mother used to have him and Alphonse do the same thing. Him and his brother would often argue over who did it, because the other one had to be the one who ended up doing the dishes. He had to admit he was kind of a brat back then, because he would sometimes blackmail or bribe Alphonse into washing the dishes for him.

Looking around, he finally realized where the plates were, but...

I can't reach it.

Immediately, Edward found himself cursing his height more than ever.

"Did you say twelve teaspoons of mayonnaise?" Roy asked.

"Yes." Riza answered.

"Okay, just making sure..." Roy said, a bit nervously, insecurity evident in his voice, both him and Riza oblivious to Edward's... dilemma.

Edward wanted to use his alchemy, but he knew it would attract attention, which was the last thing he wanted at the moment, and same thing with using a chair.

He refused to give Roy a reason to make fun of him for being short.

But what could he do?

There had to be some way he could get to the shelf.

Maybe...

Smirking, he got an idea. He jumped up and clung to the floor of the cabinet with his automail hand. He used his other hand to reach up and grab what he was looking for.

Hah. Piece of cake.

However, what he didn't foresee was...

CRACK

"Ack...!" Within an instant, the entire shelf bottom collapsed, sending both him and all the dishes topping to the ground. For a few seconds, the kitchen was filled with the sound of plates, bowls, and cups shattering as he shielded his head from the falling glassware.

"What in the...?" Roy uttered, looking up to see him surrounded by broken glass.

Immediately, he and Riza rushed over.

"What did you do?!" Roy demanded.

"I..." Edward couldn't bring himself to speak, realizing just how stupid and childish his reasoning would have sounded.

"Were you trying to reach the plates? Why didn't you just get a chair?" Riza asked.

"I guess I didn't think to..." Edward lied. In reality, he had wanted to prove that he didn't need height to do something like this. Of course, his pride had led him to a floor full of glass.

Roy suddenly stifled a laugh. "Oh, that figures. You were feeling inferior, weren't you? You wanted to prove that you could reach it on your own; that you didn't need to be tall to accomplish such a simple task, didn't you?"

Edward grew tense at being found out. His height wasn't only a simple tick, it was something that genuinely frustrated him, especially with all the pressure society put on men to be tall. It was like if you were short, you were nothing but a laughing stock, and he hated it. Not to mention all the limitations that came along with it.

Edward was taken aback when he felt a hand on his head as Roy gave a small sigh. "Being tall isn't all it's cracked up to be, kid."

"Yes," Riza interjected. "In some cases, being shorter can even be an advantage."

"Oh, yeah?" Edward pouted. "How so...?"

"For example, you would be a lot more nimble than Hawkeye or myself, simply because you're smaller. And you can fit through areas that we can't." Roy explained.

"But nobody takes you serious when you're short!" Edward retorted.

"Exactly," Roy said, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. "That's *why* you have the advantage. You're one of the talented alchemists out there, yet they won't even see it coming, which is why it makes it a lot easier to deceive your opponent and get them to let down their guard."

He then kneeled closer to whisper into his ear, pretending to avoid letting Riza hear him.

"Also, just between me and you, if you were a Colonel, you might even have less paperwork than me."

Edward couldn't help but smirk. "Thanks, but I'd rather avoid as much paperwork as possible all together if I can help it."

Roy smiled, unable to resist ruffling the boy's hair once again that morning. "Now, let's get this cleaned up so we can get back to making breakfast, alright?"

"Right." Edward nodded. Boy, was he glad he had alchemy and this was Roy and Riza. If it had been Izumi...

He practically shuttered at the thought.

...

"Here's the eggs." Riza said, placing the deviled eggs she and Roy had prepared on the table. "The Colonel can do something a little valuable in the kitchen after all." Edward teased. Roy had mixed the yolk in with the other ingredients, while Riza had refilled the eggs with the concoction.

"Quiet. I'm not the one going around breaking dishes, because I'm too stubborn to use a chair."

"At least I fixed them." Edward grumbled.

"What if you hadn't had alchemy? What would you do then?"

"Alright, boys. No more arguing. Eat." Riza scolded.

"Hey, why are you lumping me in with *him*? That's no way to treat your superior, Hawkeye...!" Roy muttered.

"What's that supposed to mean?!" Edward glared at Roy. However, before either of them could continue quarreling, a deviled egg had been shoved into their mouths by Riza.

"I said to *eat*."

"Fine..." Roy grumbled, mouth full.

"Woah, this is pretty good." Edward commented, chewing the egg. "Thanks, Hawkeye."

"I *did* help *too*, you know..." Roy mumbled, feeling a little dejected.

"Yes, you did. Good job, sir." Riza said, caving to his fantasies.

"Yeah, thanks, Colonel..." Edward added, surprising Roy, before grinning. "for trying."

...

"Are you trying to braid your hair?"

Edward looked up at Riza, who had noticed the frustrated look on his face as he was trying, once again, to gather his hair the way he needed it to be. He'd been through the same process multiple times, but couldn't seem to get the braid right no matter what he did. It was usually something Edward had Alphonse do for him, but since Alphonse wasn't there, he had no choice but to do it himself.

"Yeah, but I can't get it right..." Edward explained, miffed.

"I can do it for you, if you want." Riza offered, a bit amused.

"Well, are you sure...?" Edward murmured a bit uncertainly, not wanting to be any trouble. (Since when did he become like humble Alphonse?!)

"Please, I'd be glad to." Riza insisted. Doing hair was something she had some experience in and it was a rather enjoyable feat at times.

"Alright, thanks..." Edward turned away uncertainly, as she moved around to gather his hair into three even sections.

"It's no problem, really. Down the middle right?" Riza asked, giving a small smile.

"Yeah." Edward answered. Her fingers worked away at braiding his soft hair, bringing a tinge of warmth to his being.

After they finished, everybody soon left the house. Roy and Riza told Edward that he didn't have to come with them as long as he didn't leave the town, as well as warning him to use as little alchemy as possible, which worked out fine, because he wanted to explore some stuff on his own anyway.

However, he didn't get very far before something hard and heavy suddenly hit him in the back of the head. He cursed, rubbing at the spot in pain, when he looked down to see a rock.

"Hey!" He swiftly turned around to see a boy standing near a tree a little ways over, smirking mischievously at him. His medium length white hair glistened in the light, lightly blowing in the breeze, just as Edward's was. It only took a moment to recognize him as the same boy as he'd seen the night before.

It's him!

Within a second, the boy took off running.

"Get back here!" Edward shouted following behind him.

They darted in between and swerved around buildings, Edward calling after him the whole time. Eventually, the blonde was led into a field of flowers.

"I didn't want to do this if I could avoid it, but looks like you leave me no choice!" Edward clapped his hands together, quickly putting them to the ground. Within a few seconds, a fist made out of dirt formed and headed towards the white haired male.

However, he deftly moved out of the way, smirking at him again.

"An alchemist, huh?!" He sounded excited, running towards him faster than Edward could have anticipated. "What a coincidence. So am I!"

The boy clapped his hands, sending immediate warning signals off in Edward's mind. Placing his hand on the ground he created spikes, sending them hurdling in Edward's direction.

Edward quickly created a wall, shielding himself from the speleothems. Unfortunately, his defense only held up so long and as a result, gravel was thrown everywhere, a large rock soon hitting him in the stomach and causing him to fall back. He reached out, creating a spear just in the nick of time to thwart the boy's oncoming attack.

Spear met spear.

"Who are you?" Edward glared at him.

The boy slipped down to tower over Edward, slightly sitting on top of him.

"Hm... I don't really know if I want to tell you. How about you put away the weapon first, since we both know you're not going to kill me. And maybe then we'll talk." the boy's pink eyes dangerously narrowed at the blonde.

"I don't think so, pal. You're the one who started this fight by throwing that rock at me." Edward wasn't deterred at the slightest.

"Very well." The albino sighed. Within an instant, he managed to break Edward's spear, then putting the tip of his own to the blonde's throat.

"Now, it's not very dignified to ask for somebody else's identity without giving out your own first. So what's your name?"

Edward averted his gaze. "It's Alfred."

The boy could tell he was lying. "No, I meant your *real* name."

"Edward..." Edward muttered.

"Edward *what*?"

"Elric..."

"Wait, *the* Edward Elric? The Fullmetal Alchemist?" The boy's eyes widened, interest in him apparent on his face.

"Yeah, that's right. What of it?" Edward wasn't particularly in the mood to sing the glories of his fame at the moment.

"I've heard of you before, but where's your big brother; the guy in the suit of armor?" The boy inquired.

"That's none of your business, and for your information, he's my *younger* brother." Edward scowled.

"Oh?" The boy stifled a laugh. "How ironic."

"Yeah, whatever. Just shut up." Edward grumbled, glancing off to the side for a moment.

"My name is Kanon." The boy introduced himself at long last, as he got up, still not removing the spear from his neck.

"Do you have something against me? If I did anything to piss you off, then just tell me instead of throwing rocks at me." Edward said.

"Aww, it was only a little one. Surely, it didn't hurt *that* bad..." Kanon smirked. "Or is your level of tolerance just as small as your body?"

"Shut up, you're even shorter than I am!" Edward retorted. Screw Mustang's words. He was still pissed all the same.

"So?" Kanon shrugged, nonchalantly. "I couldn't care less about my height, but you..."

He snickered. "You have such a *short fuse*."

"You really like trodding on people's sore spots, don't you?!" Edward fumed. In that moment, he dared to reach up, knocking aside the spear, taking the moment as a opportunity to jump up. He threw a punch at Kanon, who edged back, catching his arm.

"Of course, it wouldn't be fun any other way." Kanon grinned. Before Edward could say anything further, he continued, noticing his automail. "Automail, huh? I can tell yours has some really nice craftsmanship. I almost envy you, but I think mine does the trick quite well."

He used a finger to pull his left sleeve back to reveal an automail arm of his own, the metal shining in the sunlight. The design wasn't anything overly fancy, but Kanon seemed quite content with it.

"Speaking of which, you didn't have to use a transmutation circle." Edward pointed out, throwing out a kick, causing Kanon to let go and jump back. Edward gave an all-knowing expression. "Mind telling me what that's about?"

For the briefest moment, there a was a flash of what appeared to be bitterness and regret in Kanon's eyes, but it was gone as quickly as it came.

"I'm sure you've already figured it out yourself, so there's no use hiding it." Kanon shrugged casually. "I'm the same as you, at least to a degree."

Their eyes met. "You treaded on forbidden ground and tried to bring somebody back to life. Let me guess. You lost a limb in trying to bring them back, and your brother lost his body, so in a desperate attempt to keep from losing him too, you sealed his soul to a suit of armor. Now you two are facing the consequences of your actions. Am I right?"

"You're pretty sharp with deduction, I'll give you *that* much." Edward said regrettably, before creating another spear and then advancing towards him.

"Well, I am good at putting rumors together and differentiating the truth from lies... Or more importantly..., *filling in the blanks*." Kanon explained, as he gracefully moved aside to avoid the oncoming slew of attacks. "You see... I love puzzles. Whether it be the puzzles you can buy at markets, or even the puzzles of life. How does it all tie together? What makes people into what they are? Why do people do the things they do? These are the kind of questions I constantly ask myself."

"From the sound of it, I highly doubt you do it out of a desire to actually help people." Not impressed by the philosophical babble, Edward gave his own input, before being kneed in the solar plexus by Kanon, causing him to fall, the wind knocked out of him. Even though Kanon was smaller than him, Edward hadn't managed to get a single hit on him. Maybe Roy was right after all. Not that Edward had really intentionally underestimated him or liked admitting it.

"You're right." Kanon admitted without shame, standing over him, as he proceeded to kick him in the face. "It's mere curiosity. I couldn't care less about the individuals themselves. A dead body could be lying right in front of me right now and it would just be another puzzle for me to solve."

Edward felt a chill go down his spine, beginning to feel sick to his stomach at hearing him. Kanon honestly sounded like some kind of psychopath. He couldn't even help but feel like he was the type of person that would shoot somebody in the face or torture them just to see their facial expressions.

"You're sick...," Edward choked out, scowling, creating a spike in the ground, forcing the other to back off. Kanon did a back flip, landing on his feet in a lithesome manner.

"Call it what you want. It makes no difference to me what you label as right or wrong. Society puts too much pressure on that crap, anyways." Kanon shrugged.

Before Edward could say anything, a voice shouted out catching their attention:

"Kanon...!" It was a girl with short brown hair. She wore a yellow kimono-style dress with a brown strip of fabric holding it together.

"Lana... What are you doing here?" Kanon asked, sounding uncharacteristically irritated.

"I was looking for you, because part of Remi's house collapsed, so we need your help... Hey, are you picking on people again?!" Lana demanded, putting her hands on her hips. "How many times do I have to tell you to stop?!"

"I was just having a little fun, sis, as I've told you every other time!" Kanon said, clearly not seeing his actions as wrong.

"A little fun, my ass. He busted me in the back of the head to pick a fight with me!" Edward retorted, after getting up.

Kanon sighed, shrugging nonchalantly. "And you were totally asking for it, so what's the problem?"

"I was *not*!" Edward stomped a foot down as he threw his spear at Kanon, scraping his cheek ever-so-slightly. Kanon caught the spear.

"Kanon, stop it!" Lana shouted.

"Fine, you win," Kanon smirked coyly, giving in, ignoring the blood dripping down his face. "but I do have one other thing to say."

Before Edward could defend himself, Kanon wisped him towards him by the flesh wrist. "Actually, two things. One, your secret about being Fullmetal is safe with me, and secondly..."

Edward's eyes widened, as the next words came out of his mouth:

"You know... You really should learn to hide your cuts better." Kanon whispered into his ear.

As Edward froze up, Kanon got off of him, letting go of his arm.

"Bye, now." Kanon smirked maliciously, as he walked off. "It's such a shame that I have to leave, though because I was really enjoying our little *chat*, dear *Alfred*."

Edward wanted to throw up after that. He couldn't bring himself to go after him and instead just stood there, rubbing his arm.

"I'm sorry if my brother caused you any trouble..." Lana said softly, walking over to him. Edward looked up to see Lana approaching him.

"Are you okay?" she asked, her sky blue eyes meeting his golden ones.

"Yeah, I think so, but I have half-a-mind to sock him a good one if I see him again..." Edward muttered. "Is he always like that?"

"I'm afraid so..." Lana scratched the back of her head nervously. Her sleeves were incredible wide and even longer than her arms. She looked downcast. "Ever since our sister died, he changed... But I probably shouldn't be talking about this. Sorry."

"I see..." Edward looked down at hearing that, a pained look in his eyes. He couldn't help but wonder if he could have turned out the same way if Alphonse had died.

Briefly, he recalled Riza's words from the day before, thinking back to Kanon's love for 'puzzles' and piecing things together:

"When we face painful experiences... We often try to rationalize them, whether or not there's a logical reason for it."

As much as it sickened him, it made him wonder if it was some twisted philosophy that had he started clinging to as a way to cope with everything he'd been through.

I can't think about this. There's no excuse for the way he acted.

He quickly forced himself to avoid thinking about it for the time being. He was still pissed off at the guy and that hadn't changed. Even so, Lana seemed to care about him.

"You should probably go after him in case he tries to start something with somebody else. I'll take care of returning the area to what it was before all of this."

"Right... Thank you. Sorry, again..." Lana smiled, running off after Kanon.

Edward was left staring after them, deep in thought, several questions lingering on his mind. Anger was consuming him.

"What's with that guy, anyway?" He muttered, but nobody heard him.

...

"Oh, they say a lot of bodies have been turning up in the forest lately..." Caspar said that evening.

"Is that so...?" Roy looked down at the corn on his plate, a melancholic expression on his face.

"Forest?" Riza inquired.

"Selbstmordwald..." Roy murmured.

Riza looked at him, confused.

"It's the name of it." Caspar explained. "And it has several other names too. 'The Silent Forest', 'The Crimson Forest', and... 'The Suicide Forest'..."

"I see." Riza understood the implication.

"People sometimes go there to kill themselves, but lately there have been more and more people coming here for that sole purpose, yet others suspect that's it's not just suicide. Some people are starting to suspect there being another party involved."

"They think it's murder?" Roy asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Yeah, I don't really know what to believe myself, but I don't want to completely count out the possibility, you know?" Caspar said.

"It's probably better that you don't," Roy admitted. "It's smarter to be cautious about something like this."

Edward sat listening, but didn't say anything.

"Maybe, we should check into the rumors, to see how much base there is to them." Riza thought aloud.

"Yeah." Roy agreed.

"Well, whatever you do, try not to get yourselves killed." Caspar warned. "With all the antagonism between the military and citizens lately, it's been hectic enough, so to think there might be some crazy serial killer on the run that's this good at hiding his tracks... It's rather unnerving to say the least."

"I can only imagine, keep yourself safe too, Caspar..." Roy told him.

"I'll try. Also, I'll give you a ride again tonight if you want it." Caspar smiled lightly.

"Sure, we'd appreciate that." Roy said.

...

That night Edward lied in bed, thinking back to his unpleasant fight with Kanon.

Not only did he not have to clap, but his personality was incredibly unsettling. And then there was the murders.

Could Kanon... have been connected to it somehow?

He knew that it was terrible to jump to those kind of accusations, but even so, he couldn't help it.

He guessed he could only wait until he saw him again to get to bottom of the crap. He still didn't even know why the bastard had picked a fight with him in the first place.

...

A/N: The plot will begin to pick up in the next few chapters. Don't know how big the actual plot is going to be, but Mustang and Riza will soon begin to suspect that something's wrong with Edward. And still no Alphonse, I'm so sorry... :'(I hope this was satisfactory haha...

Progression

Story: It is What it is, Chapter 5
Disclaimer: I don't own FMA

After the next chapter or so, we'll start getting to the confrontation about Edward's self-harm, just a note.

((Finally, a chapter that has a little bit of Alphonse in it~. And other stuff. Also, this festival ISN'T filler. There's a huge purpose for it.

...

The next day, Riza woke up before everybody else. The sun had risen, light spilling through the windows. Slowly, she made her bed, before going to the bathroom and fulfilling her morning nessesities. Afterwards, she then came back into the bedroom, noticing a troubled expression on Roy's face as she passed by.

Kneeling down to his bed side, she spoke in a soft voice:

"Colonel..."

When he didn't respond, she repeated herself a little louder.

Still no response.

"Roy, wake up. You're having a nightmare." She finally said, rubbing a hand on the side of his face. With a jolt, he woke up, looking up at her, the terror in his eyes obvious. However, when he took in his surroundings, he began to calm down.

"Hawkeye,... you called me by my first name..." He said weakly, giving a light smile, despite the pain in his eyes. Nightmares were a fairly common occurrence for both of them to deal with, so Riza understood what he was going through.

Her eyes widened ever so slightly in realization and she couldn't help but blush a bit. However, she quickly regained her composure. "Oh, so I did. Forgive my insubordination, sir."

"No, it's fine." Roy said, in a low voice. "Roy is fine, at least for this weak."

"With all due respect, Colonel, it would be inappropriate for me to speak to you on such an informal basis." Riza mumbled.

"Please, I insist." He told her, as he began to sit up, before letting out a small chuckle. "Besides, you've already called me 'honey'. I don't think it could get more informal than that."

Feeling her ears growing hotter than before, Riza decided to change the topic. "What were you dreaming about...? If you don't mind me asking..."

She stood up and sat next to him, figuring he wouldn't mind. It hadn't been the first time Riza had walked in on Roy having a nightmare, after all.

Roy was silent for a moment, before speaking back up. "Reliving memories from Ishval..."

He had a grim and tortured look on his face.

"I see..." Riza mulled over it. She had figured as much.

"There's always so much blood..." Roy murmured, looking down at his hands. "It felt so real... Like I was still there."

"I know..." Riza mumbled. Even for her, the war was not over in her heart. She knew that Roy felt the same. "I want to say that it's okay because we're not there anymore..., but we both know that in the end, it's *not* okay, and nor will it *ever* be..."

Nothing they could do or say would ever give back the lives that had been taken by them in Ishval. They would forever have their hands stained and that was a fact.

Roy placed a reassuring hand over hers. "No, but it is what it is."

"Yes..." Riza nodded. "I'm sorry, sir..."

She herself still hadn't entirely healed from her own past, so she wasn't about to begin to think herself as being capable of healing somebody else when she couldn't even help herself half the time. Inspirational words were true enough, but when the memories struck, it didn't mean they weren't painful.

"Don't apologize." Roy told her, knowing the look in her eyes. "You being here by my side right now means more than any words could have meant to me. I'll probably never get over what happened in Ishval, or what I've done, and maybe I don't deserve to. But... whenever I'm around you, I feel like I'm not alone, like it's a little bit easier to bear because you understand, you know?"

He gave a saddened smirk. "Maybe that's selfish of me."

"No, I don't think it's selfish at all..." Riza shook her head, giving his hand a light squeeze of her own. "It's perfectly normal to find comfort in the company of somebody who understands what you've been through from personal experience during times of suffering."

"You think so...?" Roy mused. "Maybe you're right. Thank you..., Riza..."

Riza gave a small smirk. "Don't mention it, Roy..."

Roy's face heated up a bit at hearing that, before he decided to change the subject just as she had before. "We should probably get around."

"Right." Riza, in reality, could tell that Roy was getting just as flustered as herself, which was somehow charming, not that she needed to say it aloud. After all, she herself might have been getting just a little too close as well.

...

"Cotton Drifting Festival?" Edward rose an eye brow.

"Yes, it's a festival where some of the towns people are going to be gathering to drop cotton balls into the stream a ways down the road." Riza explained.

"What's the purpose? Seems a little pointless, doesn't it?" Edward wasn't trying to be rude, but he'd never been the kind of person to hold back from stating his opinion if he had one.

"Apparently, they see it as renewal of the soul. Going by their logic, our sins will wash away with the cotton." Riza told him.

"Sounds stupid to me." Edward muttered. As if anything could ever erase his sins.

"It's a tradition that's been practiced here for about two hundred years, so at least try to show a *little* respect." Roy flicked him in the forehead.

"Ow! Hey, you didn't have to flick me!" Edward shouted, rubbing his forehead as he glared at Roy. "Great, now you're sounding a bit like Major Armstrong..."

"Either way, you're going to be coming with us." Roy choicefully ignored his comments.

"Huh? Why do *I* have to go?" Edward really hadn't wanted to. He had his own agenda to take care of, and involving himself in a festival to throw cotton into some stupid river wasn't part of it. He still needed to go and find Kanon. Furthermore, they'd heard about The Suicide Forest and the suspicious stuff going on, so why the hell were they wasting their time with such a thing?

"Because I said so." Roy said flatly, before receiving a dirty look from Riza. "And also because it would look bad on us if you *didn't* show up. It is a family-oriented festival, after all. Any objections?"

Riza still wasn't pleased with his response, but decidedly let it slide, looking over at Edward.

"No..." Edward lied, not wanting to talk about the boy he'd met the day before.

"Did you have somewhere else you were planning to go?" Riza inquired.

"Sort of... But it's nothing important." Edward said regrettably.

"I see, well most of the stuff in the town is closed, anyway." Riza told him. "So, you won't really be able to go much of anywhere."

It was sheer coincidence that they had decided to come on the week of a festival. Edward found himself cursing his crap luck.

"Great, thanks..." Edward said sarcastically, glaring at Roy.

He was not going to like this.

"Try not to be too resentful of the Colonel, Edward." Riza told him. "You might actually end up enjoying this."

With folded arms and a scowl, he gave one last bitter protest:

"I doubt it."

...

He still was doubting it.

Paper streamers, banners, numerous stands, vendors and various games were set up at street sides.

Over on the far left, towards a string of apartments, some people were serving free breakfast items, like eggs, bacon, grits, oatmeal, and other such things. Each person was getting a fair portion on their plates, the smell of the food wafting in the air around them.

Looking around him, Edward realized just how many people had gathered for this event. "This must be a pretty famous festival..." He mused, though nobody heard him.

Eventually, he decided to go to the line, and about fifteen minutes later, it was up to him, Roy and Riza to get a plate. Edward got a bit of everything, and the man serving even gave him an extra piece of bacon.

Now, Riza was left waiting for Roy.

"How ya been, Alastair? It's been a while, hasn't it?" The server smiled, recognizing his face. He was an older, slightly heavier set man.

"Hey, Dan! I've been alive, at least. How about you?" Roy said, grinning himself.

"Same, to be honest. All we can do is take things a day at a time." Dan admitted, reminding Roy briefly of Caspar's words. "The military may be as unhelpful and greedy as ever, but we've found our ways to keep our heads held high. Speaking of which, who's the lady beside you? Did you finally go and get yourself a wife?"

The man smirked slyly.

"Yup." Roy smiled, pulling Riza to his side in a hug. "This is Elizabeth."

Riza, while looking unphased, was actually taken aback at the physical contact.

"Wow! Good for you! She's a real looker too, so you better take good care of her or I might just steal her away from you." Dan joked.

Before either Roy or Riza could respond, Edward pointed to Riza with his thumb. "I wouldn't count on getting a chance with that one. He's totally head-over-heels in love with her."

Dan stared at him for a moment, before blinking. "Woah, you really take after your mother, little girl."

Edward immediately started seething. "Little... girl?"

His bangs fell in his eyes, shadowing his face.

Roy stifled a laugh, as he walked over to stop Edward from lunging at Dan, who seemed confused.

"No, Dan, this is our son, Alfred." Roy said, patting Edward on the head.

"Got that? *Son*. I'm a *boy*." Edward held up his fist.

"Son? Huh, I'm sorry about that! Must have been thrown off by your voice* and hair. There's also the matter of how short you-" Dan tried to say, but was interrupted by Edward.

((*Edward is voiced by a female in Japanese, so he sounds a bit feminine.))

"Don't call me short!" the blonde fumed.

"Now, Alfred..." Riza decided to intervene. "Remember the benefits we talked about... not being as tall as everybody else?"

"...Fine." Edward muttered, before surprisingly backing up, allowing Roy to lead him off.

"I'm sorry about that." Riza sighed.

"It's fine. I totally understand, kids will be kids and you've got a mighty feisty one there." Dan laughed a little.

Riza gave a small smile of fondness. "That we do."

"I'm making you and your husband a plate, and I'll just put a bit of everything on it, so you can go on and look around. After all, if I keep my other people waiting much longer, I'm pretty sure one *them* are gonna start blowing a fuse."

"It's well appreciated. Thank you, sir."

"Don't mention it." The man smiled, as he handed them to her.

Riza smiled as a gesture, before she began to walk off after Roy and Edward. It was at that moment that Dan called back out to her. "Oh, and Elizabeth, you have a good man there. I can see in his eyes that he thinks a lot of you, so don't go breaking his heart now."

She gave a light smile, before walking off. A part of her briefly pondered the bond that she and Roy shared. It wasn't something that either one of them had ever bothered to put a name

to. The mutual understanding they had for each other was enough. But now she couldn't help it, because of the way Roy had been acting. Where was the line to be drawn between friendship and love? Could he be-

"Ah, Elizabeth!" Roy snapped her out of her thoughts. He was grinning. "We were just talking about going to play some of the games around here."

Roy and Riza may have business here to look into anything suspicious, but that didn't mean Roy cared or planned to spend one hundred percent of his time doing his 'job'. And doing something like playing games were better than nothing. He wasn't entirely boring. He did like Chess, after all.

However, noted by Riza, it was somehow hilarious to hear Roy talk about playing games like a kid.

...

After they finished eating, they threw their plates into a nearby trashcan, before walking around to look at the different stands, before finally coming across a dart game.

It caught Riza's attention immediately.

"You wanna try? Unless you want to win a prize, you can play for free." The man, at the stand offered. He had a name tag that read 'Toni'.

Roy and Edward looked back at her.

"Of course, I'd love to." Riza said, smiling a little.

"Alright, here." Toni handed her five darts, before he stood to the side to avoid being hit.

Riza stepped back a bit to make it more of a challenge.

She held up one of the darts, aiming it. Roy and Edward watched as she began to throw one after the other getting a bullseye for every single one. Having practiced shooting guns day in and day out made a feat like darts seem like nothing.

"Woah!" Edward shouted, amazed.

"You're really good at this, ma'am!" Toni complimented, as he handed the darts back to her again.

"That's my wife for you." Roy smirked proudly, almost sounding like Hughes. Edward couldn't help but look down at hearing that. All of the reminders were causing him to hurt more and more.

That was when Riza held the darts out to him, noticing the forlorn expression on his face. "Here, try it."

He gazed up at her, a bit of uncertainty in his eyes. It was obvious that he also hadn't expected her to offer him to play. He waved nervously. "No, I couldn't. I wouldn't be any good at it."

"Ah, who cares about good?" Toni said. "Just have some fun. It's not like I'm getting any business right now, anyway."

"Yes, I insist." Riza said.

Edward looked to Roy for some subconscious sense of approval.

"Go for it. Then I'll do it and we'll see who's better." Roy challenged. "How about that?"

"You're on." Edward gave in, smirking. "But don't come crying to me if you lose."

"I wouldn't dream of it."

...

In the end, Edward lost, but surprisingly did get one bullseye, while Roy got four.

"This game is rigged." Edward muttered, pouting.

"Now what was that about somebody coming to somebody crying?" Roy put his hands on his hips, bending down to eye level, more than ready to rub it in his face.

"Just shut up... You only won because you've trained..." Edward retorted bitterly. He left it ambiguous, but both Riza and Roy knew he was referring to their training in the military.

"They do say practice makes perfect." Toni echoed.

"He's right." Riza said. "I'm sure you could get better if you kept at it."

Even though Edward had got only one bullseye, he'd come awfully close on a few of the others.

"Can I see those again?" Riza asked.

"Sure." Toni handed her the darts again.

"Alfred, stand here." Riza told Edward, who complied, a bit confused.

"Huh? What is it?" Edward blinked.

"Take this." Riza held out one of the darts.

"Okay."

"An important thing to realize when it comes to darts is that when you aim for a bullseye, aim a little above your target, because otherwise, it will go lower than you want it to." Riza explained.

"Alright." Edward said. "I'll give it a shot."

Aiming, he threw it, amazed when he succeeded. "Hey, I got one!"

Excitedly, he turned to Riza. "I want to try again."

"Of course." Riza gave a small smile. "Here."

Edward, this time, missed by about an inch. Trying again, he got another, and when he finished, he'd finished he'd hit bullseye 3/5 times.

"Good job, kid." Roy smirked.

"Yes, you did great." Riza beamed light, gently rubbing him on the head.

Edward felt his heart melt at the praise, and for the briefest moment, he forgot that it was supposed to be an act. He cursed himself afterwards, for once again, having so much fun. He couldn't allow himself to grow this attached, he knew, because not only were Riza and Roy doing this partially as a show, but he would find it much harder to pull away when it came time to.

As time passed and it became noon, the heat of the sun set in. At that point, most everybody else was wearing short sleeves, causing Edward to stick out like a sore thumb.

"Aren't you hot in that?" Riza asked Edward, who'd kneeled down to pet a white cat that happened to be passing by, receiving a glance from Roy.

"No, not really. I'm used to it." Edward said a bit nervously, before speaking in a lower voice to prevent too many from hearing him. "Besides, I'd rather not show off my automail if I can help it."

The last time that happened, he ended up getting pick-pocketed by Paninya. There's no telling what kind of people were around here this time.

But that wasn't the only reason he insisted on long sleeves, of course. It was true, however, that Edward's automail had warranted unwanted attention in the past, on several occasions, which was something he wanted to avoid if possible. And it was also true that he'd grown used to it; to wearing long sleeves, to the point he didn't feel comfortable going without them, and it wasn't a habit he particularly wanted to break.

After all, the main issue was the cuts. It terrified him to think that Roy and Riza would be disappointed with him if they found out, if not angry. So it was a situation he *needed* to avoid at all costs, and he was somehow grateful that he could use his automail as a believable excuse to cover up such a thing.

"I see..." Riza said, even though she didn't entirely believe that that was all there was to it. She could see it in his face that he wanted to say more.

"Sir... I think there may be something we're not being told." Riza turned to whisper to Roy.

"That's my guess." Roy nodded. They both looked down at the boy who was happily playing with the cat.

...

"So did you hear? There were five bodies found last week in Selbstmordwald."

"Was it asphyxiation again...?"

"Well, three of them. Two of them were probably normal suicides."

"How scary. Sounds a little suspicious, doesn't it?"

Roy, Riza and Edward happened to pass by some teens on a bench, who were discussing The Suicide Forest.

"Excuse me, ladies?"

Riza and Edward looked up when Roy decided to interject their conversation.

One girl had dark red hair and light blue eyes, the other had black hair and brown eyes, as well as light tan skin, carrying the obvious facial features and appearance of somebody from Xing.

They looked up over their shoulder at him, wondering what he had to say.

"Yes? Can I help you?" The Xingese lady questioned politely.

"I couldn't help but notice that you were discussing Selbstmordwald." Roy said.

The women grew tense, exchanging glances, as if they had been discussing something they really shouldn't have been.

"What about it?" The red haired lady asked, a wary look in her eyes.

"You said that the deaths are by asphyxiation, right?" Roy wanted to know.

"Yes." The girls nodded, wondering what he was getting at.

"Has there been any other specific pattern that links the deaths to each other?" Roy inquired.

"Come to think of it, they've all been found after each Saturday this past month, haven't they...?" The Xingese lady mulled over it, looking up to the other for confirmation.

"Oh, yeah, you're right." The redette echoed, thinking about it.

"How many has died so far this month from asphyxiation?" Roy asked.

"...Twelve in total so far, if I'm not mistaken..."

"Three every Saturday?"

"...Oh god..." The Xingese lady's stomach turned at the realization. "Yeah."

With Roy's suspicions confirmed, he thought about it. Somebody had to be behind it. It wasn't even an argument anymore. And if it was asphyxiation in a manner that that murder had not been suspected... It had to be some kind of drug.

Roy soon thanked them before departing.

"So what do you think?" Riza inquired. She had her own guesses on the causes, but she wanted to hear a second opinion on the matter.

"I was a bit skeptical at first, but it does sound like murder to me." Roy decided.

Edward listened to them, but once again said nothing, opting to just take in what info was thrown at him before making a solid conclusion of his own.

"Do you think it could a be a drug causing the asphyxiation?" Riza asked.

"It's likely. Perhaps, the killer is somehow administering it to them by force..." Roy pondered it. "It would have to be somebody that works at a pharmacy or has experience with creating those kind of drugs."

That's when it dawned on him. "A drug dealer..."

Riza put a finger to her chin, deep in thought. "Up to this point, it's been every Saturday..."

Her eyes widened at the realization and implication. "Sir, that means three people are probably going to die today."

"Yeah..." Roy nodded, before his eyes narrowed grimly. "Unless we do something about it first."

"That bastard is probably smirking because he thinks he's gonna get away with it... As if I'd allow him too." Edward muttered, remembering Kanon's mocking face. He'd seemed suspicious from the start, but Edward found himself becoming sick at thinking that Kanon was even worse than he'd originally imagined. It almost *had* to be him behind it.

Now it really *was* personal.

...

Alphonse had been dealing with a lot. When it came down to it, he was beginning to realize that cats were honestly a handful to look after, they loved to scratch into things, to jump on top of fridges and knock glasses over.

Racheal, who Riza had sent Alphonse to meet, had left him in charge of her cats for the day. It wouldn't have been a huge problem if she'd only had about three cats, but the woman had nineteen! She hadn't bothered to get them neutered nor declawed because she felt that it would have been a perversion to the way they were made to be and also felt it would have been cruel to take all that away from them.

Racheal was a pretty nice and laid back lady, but also appeared to have a bit of a temper. Earlier that morning, she was yelling on the phone about somebody cheating her out of her money. And while he understood her frustration, from the unrepeatable things that he had heard her shout before she stormed out the door to meet up with somebody, he was terribly glad that he wasn't on her bad side and hoped it would stay that way.

"What time is it...?" A little boy's voice murmured groggily, as he traipsed into the living room where Alphonse was. He had short black hair, big blueberry colored eyes and was wearing a dark blue long sleeve v-neck shirt, alongside a pair of khaki pants. Freckles covered his nose and the skin beneath his eyes. He appeared to be about eight years of age.

It was Rachel's son, Len. She had left Alphonse in charge of looking after him. She told him that while she wouldn't have normally trusted Alphonse with him, it was a different matter since Riza trusted him.

"Oh, good afternoon, Len. It's a little bit after 1. Your mom said that she'll be back at around 5." Alphonse explained, as he poured some milk into the cats' bowls.

"Oh... Alright." The boy said, walking over to a table. There was a depressing undertone to Len's voice that suggested that he was upset about something.

"Is something wrong?" Alphonse wanted to know.

Len looked off to the side. "Nothing much. It's just... she's been more and more busy lately, so I feel like she rarely has time to spend with me anymore."

Alphonse felt a little sympathy for the boy, knowing what it was like to having wanted affection from his own *father* who was never around.

"Where is your father?" Alphonse asked. He hadn't seen anybody else around and not once had Racheal mentioned a man.

"He died a few years ago..." Len said simply, as if he wasn't really bothered by the ordeal. "But I don't really know what to think about it. I never had the chance to grow attached to him, because he was constantly arguing and fighting with mum. They were separated, and he wasn't really capable of taking care of me."

It was obvious that the boy had been through a lot for his age and his eyes reflected it.

"I see..." Alphonse said. "It probably gets pretty lonely around here then..."

"Well, usually, she brings me to my grandmother's, if she can't look after me. Mom isn't mean or anything. She's as nice as they come, but she just has a lot to deal with is all. I do sometimes wish she would spend time more time with me, though. Am I bad for wanting that?" Len looked up at him with desperate eyes, wondering if he was wrong for desiring more of an emotional connection to his mother. Even when it came down to it, he had never felt that close to his mother, as much as he wanted to. They had different interests, different feelings about certain things. Maybe it was selfish of him.

He was taken aback when Alphonse patted him on of the head.

"Of course not. I think it's perfectly normal to want to know that your mom still cares. I fully understand." Alphonse said, understanding his feelings all too well. Multiple times, he wished that his father hadn't left him and his family. He didn't know why he did it, but he figured he must have some important reason, yet Alphonse would be lying if he said it didn't hurt sometimes. And unlike Edward, Alphonse had never hated Hohenheim. He still believed that one day he would come back.

"Hey, I have an idea." Alphonse thought of something.

"Hm?" Len blinked.

"I think you should write her a letter." Alphonse suggested.

"But I'm not good with letters..." Len pouted.

"It's okay, I'll help you." Alphonse said in a kind voice.

"Really?" Len looked at him hopefully.

"Mhm." Alphonse nodded.

"Okay. Let me get some paper!" The boy smiled, excitedly.

It was in that moment that Alphonse found himself thinking about Edward's hatred towards Hohenheim, and the way he kept most of his feelings about things to himself. Edward would never write a letter, unlike Len.

He wished, more than anything, that Edward *would* open up to him more. They were brothers, for pete's sake, they were supposed to be there to support one another.

I wonder how Brother is doing...

...

Edward was walking by a stand that was selling koi fish streamers, when suddenly he spotted a shock of white hair.

Immediately, he took off in the direction he saw it, ignoring protests and questions from Roy and Riza. However when he approached the boy that assuradly turned out to be Kanon, he didn't know what to think when he saw an older man fussing at him.

"I've told you it's forbidden so many times, Kanon. What would your mother say?"

"She wouldn't say anything. She's dead because of you, just like Lyra." Kanon shrugged nonchalantly, but there was an edge in his eyes that Edward hadn't seen until now. He stopped dead in his tracks when the older man hauled off and slugged him in the face, knocking him down.

Over at the side, Lana stood, not wanting to get involved, an awkward expression on her face. Several people were watching them, but nobody interfered.

"I didn't do anything to her, you brat. Alchemy is what killed her. She died because she tried to step on territory that is an insult to *god*. Do you want to go down the same path as her and lead yourself to ruin?!" The man roared, his logic not even making any sense and sounding contradictory to his previous statement.

"No..." Kanon muttered, nonetheless, rubbing his face where he'd been punched.

"Then start listening to me, or you might just be *next*." the older man said, in what appeared to be a threatening tone, as he picked him up by the collar, and proceeded to punch him in the face. Unlike the day before, Kanon made no attempt to fight back or defend himself when the latter punched him in the face again.

"You hear me?" The man glared, pulling his arm back to throw another one. It was at that moment that Edward lurched towards him, catching his arm with his automail hand.

"*I* hear you." Edward growled out, catching the surprised attention of Kanon. While he wasn't the type to usually get involved with people's affairs, and he may have not liked Kanon that much, he also wasn't the kind of person that would just stand back while a father mercilessly beat somebody in the face, especially not his own son.

"Who the hell are you?" the man barely spared him a single glance.

"I'm not inclined to tell you anything, pops, but I do suggest to stop punching him if you don't want to end up in a hospital. And trust me. The bills won't be cheap." Edward advised boldly.

Kanon's father saw Roy and Riza approaching him, right as Edward was saying that. Something in him decidedly gave in.

"Tch...! Come on, Lana." he growled out, snatching his arm out of Edward's grip, before walking off, pulling Lana with him by the wrist.

"Nobody asked you to save me, you know." Kanon simpered, bringing irritation to Edward.

"Well, maybe you should have defended yourself like you did with me yesterday." Edward turned his head away briefly. "Furthermore, I did just stop him from pumbling you so you should at least try to show a *little* appreciation...!"

"Are you okay?" Riza asked Kanon, noticing the bruising on his face. Seeing the sight had been no easier for Roy or Riza, so they probably would have interfered had Edward not. The fact that everybody else had just stood back while it was happening was kind of frustrating.

"Yeah, don't touch me." Kanon murmured, moving away.

"You two know each other?" Roy asked, a little interested.

"Yeah, he picked a fight with me yesterday." Edward then glared at Kanon. "which we still have yet to settle, by the way."

"What's there to settle? It's clear that you've already lost." Kanon smirked. Edward was pissed at hearing that.

This was going to be a *long* day.

...

A/N: I hope this turned out well... The suicide forest ordeal should be settled (along with a couple other things) by the end of the next chapter, and then we'll be getting back to focusing on Edward's depression. I just haven't wanted to make that the entire focus of the story since Riza and Roy are still on a mission.

Case Closed

I should probably clear this up, since I'm sure there are some people that's been wondering about it. I don't hate Hohenheim, unlike Edward, as I know he's a very flawed human being that had the majority of his life forced on him(at least in Brotherhood and the manga, which is what I'm basing this off of), but I strongly understand why Edward feels the way he does. No matter how you look at it, Hohenheim still abandoned him and Al, and left them to grow up and deal with things alone, and nothing can ever change that, even if he did plan to come back. Both Ed's and Al's feelings on the matter are human and relatable. To be honest, I might have been more like Alphonse and tried to reason with him, but I'm also applying a bit of my own feelings regarding the absence of my own father in my life, and the way it's made me feel. Edward is the easiest to write when it comes to that, and I tend to relate more to his snarkiness and system of thinking at times(I'm quite cynical, like Edward, but I do like writing uplifting things at times) though I relate to both of them. You know it's a good story when you can find a way to relate to two characters who are basically polar opposites at times. XD;;;)

One other thing, I hope it didn't feel like I short-handed Roy or Riza at all in this chapter. The reason I went the route I did is because Roy didn't want to get Edward involved with such a matter if he could help it. And it kind of goes along the lines of the fact that Edward is still a kid and things still go on around him whether he's witness to it or not. I'll stop, because I'm probably making it sound stupid or not making any sense.

WARNING: This is super anti-climatic and I'm sorry. I'm feeling very insecure about posting this chapter, because I have never completed writing mysteries before. So this was a new experience for me and I hope it was written well enough. (It's not the absolute end of the ordeal, but it's enough so that I can move onto the other matter at hand, being Edward's self harm.)

...

Kanon had never got along with people or made friends easily, even back in school. His white hair and pink eyes always caught negative attention from others, as it caused him to stand out, so he often got teased by his classmates. His older sister, who was an Ishvalan and also had white hair, was the only one that went out of her way to tell him that there was nothing wrong with having white hair, that his hair was beautiful because it was white as snow, nor was their anything wrong with his eyes.

Even though she didn't follow the teachings, his mother, Lilith, just like Lyra, was also Ishvalan. However, he only seemed to share her hair; their skin tone and even eye color were different, and, because of low pigmentation of melanin, the doctors had amounted it to Albinism. Lilith, however, died of a 'mysterious heart attack' when Kanon was about two years old, so he didn't remember her that well at all, except in vague memories of her holding him in her arms.

Lyra, over time, had become more of mother to Kanon than a sister, as she would sometimes tell him stories about their mother, defend him against bullies, encourage him when he was down, read him books, sing him lullabies and even tuck him into bed. She was everything to him.

His father, Gerhard, however, was the total opposite. He had always played favorites towards Lana, for being the non alchemical user in the family. Gerhard was often abusive towards Kanon and Lyra, but tended to project more of his frustrations onto Kanon because he was the smallest. Lyra would typically step in to protect him, getting beaten herself in the process.

When Kanon was ten, Lyra died in a similar manner that Lilith was said to have. *Heart failure.*

While there was no proof, Kanon was certain that Gerhard was behind it, but Lana didn't seem to believe him. Lana had never dared to stand up to her father or question him. Even when she didn't like to see Kanon or her family get beat, she didn't stop listening to him, afraid of getting beat herself. Sometimes, Lana did get Kanon to fix things for her, but as a result, if Gerhard found out, it would lead to Kanon getting hit again.

At the age of 11, Kanon was truly alone and began to become more and more anti-social, not to mention low key resentful of his father. Kanon tried to bring Lyra back when he was 11, and as a result, lost his left arm. Gerhard, after that, only became more abusive, seeing him as nothing but a disgrace to the family. He wasn't entirely sure why, but he had never defended himself against him, even though he had both parkour and had martial arts training on his side.

Kanon began to wear long sleeves to hide not only the bruises caused by his father, but also his automail. And he realized it eventually; he couldn't hate his father, no matter how much he wanted to. He figured he had his own backstory and motivation, having been in the military, but he never bothered to ask. Instead, he only tried to rationalize it in his head to distract himself. He hadn't the emotional capacity to form an actual opinion. He closed his heart off and just detached himself when it came to being beaten, taking things as it came, especially when Gerhard got drunk. In some sense, it helped numb his pain. Not that it didn't hurt, but he chose not to focus on that.

When it came to others, however, Kanon was quite misanthropic no matter you define it, even though he masked it well at times. Just like right now.

"So... I've been meaning to ask." Edward's eyes met his wary gaze.

He had been an inch away from beating the shit out of Kanon himself after enough banter before he remembered why he wanted to meet up with the guy in the first place. "Know anything about The Suicide Forest?"

Kanon's eyes flashed in surprise for a moment, before he shrugged, turning his head away in a snarky manner. "Yeah, I know some things here and there, but I don't feel inclined to tell you anything."

"Sorry, kid, but I'm afraid you don't have much of a choice in this." Roy said, stepping in his way as he tried to walk off.

"Oh? And what are you gonna do if I *don't* talk?" Kanon rose an eye brow, as if daring him to start something.

"I don't think that's something you particularly want to find out." Roy said, in a low threatening tone of voice.

Kanon gave him an unimpressed look, certain the man couldn't do any worse to him than his own father had.

"We only have a few questions to ask you, so try to bare with us." Riza assured, giving a small smile.

Briefly, Kanon was reminded of Lyra and he caved. "Fine, what do you want to know?"

"First off, what is your father's name?" Roy asked.

Kanon looked at him confused. "Gerhard Rösch, why?"

It was at that moment that everything began to click in Roy's head. He knew he had recognized the man's face, he just couldn't place who he was right off hand.

Gerhard Rosch had been a solider who worked with herbs and medicinal treatment in the military, as well as concocting poisons for weapons during the war. But after several other soldiers died in his care from unnamed causes, he was relieved of his duties and put in jail for prison time. Apparently, he'd either been released or escaped.

He was not an alchemist, but he had exceptional knowledge and skills when it came to botany and toxicology. And it made perfect sense now how murder had not been suspected.

"Elizabeth, I think we've found our culprit." Roy decided, turning to look at Riza, who nodded in response, having the same train of thought as him.

"Are you guys detectives or something?" Kanon deadpanned.

"No, we're not." Roy said, before looking at him. "But your father is now under suspicion for manslaughter."

Kanon's eyes widened for a second, before he smirked. "Ahhh, you think he's behind the deaths at Selbstmordwalt, don't you?"

"Well, isn't he?" Roy rose an eyebrow, surprised by the boy's apathy. Furthermore, Roy didn't know why he was even asking him, because it was possible the boy was an accomplice, or at least knew something, and would just defend Gerhard. What Kanon said next, however, threw him off.

"Well, see, the answer is a lot more complex than yes or no. It's like this. Gerhard is responsible, but yet he's not."

"Explain." Roy said sternly.

Kanon grew silent, a conflicted expression on his usual smug face. He had already let out more than intended, If he said anymore, he was sure that he would just get beaten again by Gerhard.

Edward recognized the look. Kanon was afraid, whether or not he tried to mask it. He was afraid of betraying Gerhard; of betraying his father.

"You're scared, aren't you...?" Edward muttered, looking away, catching the attention of both Roy and Riza. "Of being hit again. That's why you wear long sleeves, isn't it...? To hide the bruises."

Kanon was a little taken aback at how quickly Edward had made the deduction. He smirked, but his face grew melancholic, before he turned away.

"Well, It's not like there's anything I can do about it. He *is* my father, after all..."

"No, a normal father wouldn't beat their child just because they're different." Edward muttered. "I know it's painful... wanting somebody's approval... But if he's treating like *this*, you can't keep allowing him to keep doing that to you..."

It was at that moment that Kanon snapped, lunging at Edward before Riza or Roy could respond, grabbing him by a choke hold. "What would *you* know?! You have two loving parents who... You have people who actually *do* care!"

In an instant, Kanon's usual calm exterior was beginning to unravel and his true feelings were starting to show, jealousy for Edward's situation consuming him. Roy and Riza reached out, pulling him off of him.

"You're wrong...!" Edward didn't want to resort to these means of getting his way, but Kanon needed to hear it. Kanon's eyes narrowed.

"Elizabeth and Alastair aren't my parents..." Edward's hair shadowed his eyes.

"What...?" Kanon genuinely hadn't expected his response. He did know that Edward was in the military, but didn't know too much beyond what he and the latter had discussed the day prior. Though come to think of it, Edward had tried to bring somebody back before sealing his brother's soul to a suit of armor. A parent perhaps...?

He calmed down, wondering what Edward had to say.

Roy and Riza were shocked when Edward had basically blown their cover in a single sentence. Neither of them really even knew what to think, and while Roy wanted to speak up to prevent Edward from saying more, something stopped him.

Edward suddenly felt a lump in his throat, barely able to speak again. "They aren't... my family either..."

"It's true..." Riza added in a low voice, as she placed a hand on top of his head. "His real father left when he was very young and his mother died sometime after."

"She *died* waiting for him to come back, Kanon..." Edward muttered. "You can't go down the same path as her, waiting for your father to change, or clinging to the prospect that he will ever see you as his son... Because it's not worth those bruises nor the pain."

Kanon studied him with an unreadable expression, before looking away wearily.

His mother... *That must have been who he tried to bring back... Just like... Lyra...*

"...I only know so much, but I do know that my father has been forcing people to commit suicide..." he murmured, low enough that nobody except those he wanted to could hear him. He decided it was time that he told *somebody*.

"Have you told anybody before now?" Riza asked.

"Why would I? He threatened to kill me himself." Kanon said smoothly, as if it was obvious. But, now, he decided that if he got killed by Gerhard for this, so be it.

Roy clinched his fists at knowing that a father was putting his own son in this kind of position, aside from the physical abuse. Edward was no happier and Riza felt sick.

"Do you have any idea why he's doing it or what his goal is?" Riza wanted to know.

"He's a lunatic." Kanon shrugged. Even if he didn't hate his father, he wasn't beyond stating the facts. "Thinks he's worshiping a god named Ishvala by sacrificing people who have served in the military, and alchemists in general... or something like that."

(Which was kind of hypocritical since Gerhard himself had been in the military.)

The Ishvalan teachings didn't have to be carried out by just Ishvalans themselves, as they could be undertook by anybody of any racial background, so that wasn't even a dispute. But just like any other religion, different people practiced beliefs differently at times, and in some cases, there happened to be extremists that would even distort and twist doctrines as justification to commit murder for their own 'cause', and see absolutely nothing wrong with it.

Edward realized it then.

"...your secret about being Fullmetal is safe with me..."

Kanon hadn't told Gerhard about him being an alchemist because he was protecting him. If it had been any other time, Edward would have smirked.

"Elizabeth, I want you to get Kanon to a hospital to get his bruises looked after, to make sure there's no internal damage." Roy said, a dark expression on his face, ignoring the few looks they were receiving from a distance. Fortunately, most of the people had already walked off and were minding their own business, however.

"What are you going to do?" Riza wanted to know, not entirely sure she trusted Roy not to kill Gerhard himself.

"First, I'm going to make a call to get some men out here to investigate this further, Given that Gerhard cooperates, he's undoubtedly going to be held for questioning and his children are going to be taken from his custody at best. But if he doesn't... well, let's just say he's a fool if he thinks I'm just going to let him get away with what he's done." Roy clinched his fists.

"I'm going with you." Edward said. He wanted to beat the shit out of Gerhard and figured that Roy might could use some back up anyway.

"Absolutely not." Roy said sternly, meeting his gaze. "You're to stay with her."

"Hey, this is my business *too*!" Edward retorted.

"And it's even more so *Kanon's*. But he's staying with Elizabeth anyway, just as you will be." Roy replied with ease. "Since Gerhard isn't an alchemist, he shouldn't pose a huge threat, so that isn't something you need to concern yourself with. Rather... You should be focusing on the welfare of your friend at this moment."

"What? We aren't 'friends'! I barely know him!" Edward argued back, denying it.

"Are you sure about that?" Roy rose an eyebrow.

Edward didn't have an answer.

...

Edward was pissed.

Kanon hadn't wanted to go to a hospital, but decidedly went along with it.

And Riza was at a loss of what to do. Making sure that Kanon had no broken ribs or anything of the sort was most certainly important, but that didn't stop the uneasy feeling on her stomach, because she could sense just how angry Roy had been before he walked off, even if he was good at hiding it.

"Are you going tell them about it...?" Kanon suddenly spoke up after Riza had stepped out to make a phone call and give her own side on what she'd witnessed and the conclusion she and Roy had come to.

Kanon had just got an X-Ray and was waiting on the results.

"Tell them about what?" Edward asked, not following.

"The cuts." Kanon specified.

Edward's eyes widened for a moment before he looked away.

"No..." He answered bitterly, in a low voice.

"I don't blame you..." Kanon admitted, not facing him.

"You're quite agile for somebody covered in bruises." Edward commented, changing the subject.

"I've got used to it." Kanon dismissed it, as if it wasn't a big deal. In reality, Edward knew it was not fully true. One never got used to bruising. They could only become used to hiding it and trying to detach their self from it. But he didn't bother mentioning that.

Kanon didn't bother asking anything else, and not much was said after that.

...

"Gerhard Rosch, you're currently under suspicion of manslaughter. I suggest you come with us without resistance. Although we could go a much more painful route, if you'd prefer that." Roy said. Behind him stood several men from the nearby military base. They were holding guns, while Roy himself had his ignition gloves and was more than ready to light him up if need be.

It hadn't taken long to locate Gerhard.

"What's he talking about?"

"Has somebody been killed?"

"Not that I know of..."

People started to talk, gathering around to figure out what was going on and why the military was here.

"Roy Mustang..." Gerhard turned around to glare at him. Lana was at Gerhard's side, confused and obviously a bit scared.

"Ah, so you remember my face and name. Then you should have no problem knowing why you should back down while you still have the option." Roy said coolly.

Gerhard gave a smug look. "I bet you've got bored since the war is over, so now you're accusing innocent civilians of things they didn't do, just so you have an excuse to show off and cause unnecessary drama."

Roy ignored his comment, not caring to bother with arguing against trivial accusations towards himself (he'd dealt with far worse before, after all), asking the men to detain him, and bring him to a place he could be watched until the next day when he would have more leeway.

Gerhard, fortunately, didn't resist, certain that he was going to be able to prove himself innocent. In truth, he didn't even know what murders he was being accused of, because he had taken so many lives already.

Lana was left, uncertain of what to do, as she watched her father being hauled away. She knew that his actions were finally catching up to him, but she herself had been no better. After all, she had allowed it to continue without speaking up about it.

"'Lana', was it?"

She nodded, as she gazed over to see Roy kneeling in front of her.

"And you're... Roy?" she inquired. Roy figured there was no point in hiding it anymore.

"Yeah, I am... Do you mind coming with me?" Roy asked, in a bit of a harsher tone than he had intended. Yet, it didn't seem to phase her.

"Sure, where do you need me to go?"

"Well, for starters, why don't we visit your brother at the hospital?" Roy gave a small smile.

"...Alright..." Lana looked away, assuming that he had been admitted for the bruises. A part of her couldn't help but feel a little guilty. In truth, she wondered if Kanon was mad at her, for not defending him against their father. She'd never been as courageous as Lyra, and she knew that it must be painful for him to go through that alone, but she was too afraid to stand up to Gerhard.

And she hated it.

...

"I'm sorry..." Were the first words she spoke. Kanon was taken aback by the apology, before he looked away. They didn't hug; they had never hugged to begin with. Their conversations were always awkward, not affectionate like his bond with Lyra had been.

He didn't ask what the apology was for. He didn't say anything. He *couldn't*.

...

Outside the hospital room, Roy, Riza and Edward sat.

"So what are they planning?" Edward asked, a downcast look in his eyes.

"They're going to be transferring him to CBH, so they can find placement for a better home." Riza explained.

"CBH?" Edward inquired.

"It stands for Central Behavioral Health... It's a psychological institution over in Central." Roy clarified.

"Huh..." Edward mulled over it. "What about his sister?"

"She'll be going with him." Roy said.

"I see." Edward mused, getting the gist of it. "So what's going on with that Gerhard bastard?"

"He's been taken in for questioning." Roy answered. "I'll be going over to the nearby military base tomorrow to talk to him myself."

He then smirked. "But at least now, two out of three of our answers were solved."

"What do you mean?" Edward asked.

"Think about it. Former and present Military officers start committing serial suicides. Somebody is eventually bound to start spreading distorted rumors about conspiracies." Roy put it into words that made perfect sense. "Though I still have my doubts that the rumors about the weapons of mass destruction have any credence to them at all. But I guess the only thing we can do is keep our eye out."

Nobody said anything after that for a while.

...

A/N: So... This whole matter has pretty much been brought to a close, I hope it was satisfying enough, because this was hard as heck to write. I've never been one for writing mysteries, but you can thank Sherlock's "A Study in Pink/Scarlet" for the serial suicides idea.

Also, this isn't the end of Kanon, he will occationally be showing up again, and also play a fair role in later chapters. I won't spoil how, though.

Again, I've literally NEVER finished a mystery in fanfiction before, so this is the first one I've carried out. Please try to be understanding and don't hate me for how badly it was written. T-T

Now, we'll be getting to the main stuff.

Disquietude

Story: It is What it is, Chapter 7
Disclaimer: I don't own FMA. (If this chapter isn't satisfying to readers I will rewrite it. I feel like there was unnecessary stuff in this, so I would understand if people hate it.)

Now this is gonna be the tedious part, even though I'm gonna enjoy every minute of it!

...

Also, ... Fraternization... Roy and Riza technically can't get married* or *have a relationship because of fraternization laws, but I have plans, because I couldn't forgive myself if I didn't get them together eventually. Either way, they're totally in love, and nothing will ever change that. (EVEN GRUMMAN SHIPS ROY WITH HER)

There is some Royai in this chapter. (It may be a bit pointless, so ignore it if you want, I guess. It wasn't really the greatest.)

I wrote this in a way to set up for future chapters. I've re-edited and replaced certain parts of this chapter about SIX OR SEVEN times so far, but no matter what, I can't get it the way I want it to be. D'x Though the future chapters should be better than this one, I think. :D;;; Please try to be patient.

Also, I hope Roy doesn't seem too out of character at the end of this. I just feel like he would kind of panic in such a situation, even if he is usually calm and stuff. He's going to be back to normal next chapter though, but Ed and him are gonna work through some of their differences soon.

This chapter is probably a disaster and a huge mess, though... and I feel like the direction doesn't make a whole lot of sense... I was trying to get some nice passages I'd written on rough draft, but it may have ruined the flow. Hope this isn't too dramatic, but I have said this is kind of based off personal experience, and my life is pretty damn chaotic and dramatic, so...

...

The next few days went by fairly eventfully. Gerhard had tried to attack Roy when he realized the full extent of everything he was being accused of, only to gracefully get burned by him in the process. After that, Gerhard gave away most of the answers they needed. And though he never revealed what kind of drug he used, he didn't need to. As it turned out, Gerhard had escaped prison, just as Roy had suspected.

Why he had not been caught before that, they didn't know, but what mattered was that he was back in prison where he belonged with maximum security precautions applied to his sentence. And though there would be a trial eventually, that wasn't something Roy would personally be involved with.

With everything settling down, Kanon and Lana had been questioned on what they knew, and Edward had come to visit them a few times in the hospital until Wednesday when two beds over in CBH were available and both siblings were transferred over. Lana had told the doctors that she didn't want to take any of her stuff with her, as she felt it would be nice to start anew. Though a bit reluctant at first, Kanon eventually went along with her decision, agreeing that it would probably be for the best.

...

"So... I heard that you three are from the military..." Caspar said, Wednesday afternoon.

"Yeah." Roy murmured, eyes downcast, expecting Caspar to be angry at him. He waited to hear what more he had to say. Riza didn't say anything out of respect for both of them, and Edward didn't even seem to be paying attention.

"I figure you have your reasons for hiding your identities from everybody, so I won't bother prying into your personal business." Caspar gave a small smile. "Just know that you'll always be Alistair to me."

Roy returned the gesture. "Thanks, Caspar..."

"You know... You guys should get married for real some day..." Edward smirked. For a moment, he thought about Trisha and Hohenheim. While it wasn't the exact same situation, Edward wanted Roy and Riza to be able to be together, because he could tell how happy they made each other. Even if his own mother didn't get the treatment she had deserved, it didn't mean that *they* should have to go through the same thing. He didn't want anybody to go through anything like what *she* had to.

"We can't..." Roy said, looking away.

"Why not?" Edward inquired, crest-fallen.

"There are laws that prohibit it." Riza explained. "I would no longer be able to be his Lieutenant."

Fraternization. Edward vaguely remembered reading something about the policy before, but it had slipped his mind. There were too many rules to keep up with anyway, and, right now, he couldn't find it in himself to care to. "Well, I think that's *stupid*. If you love *her* and she loves *you*, you should be able to have whatever the hell kind of relationship you want. They shouldn't be able to interfere with that. It's *your* business, not *theirs*...!"

"Stupid or not, that's how it is." Roy said, simply. "I don't like it anymore than you do, kid. Why do you think I want to get to the top?"

Edward looked up at him, inquiring an answer.

"Aside from my other goals to prevent another war like what happened in Ishval, I also believe that people should be allowed to have the freedom to choose who they want to be

with." Roy told him. "That's why I will do whatever I can to get to that position to change the way things are."

Riza felt a warmth in her heart growing at hearing him, her heart beating faster than ever.

It was also in that moment that Edward gained more respect for Roy than he'd ever had before. It gave him insight to what the man behind the cold and suave exterior was all about.

"Even so...," Roy averted his gaze slightly. "I've killed too many people and my hands are stained. Part of me wonders if I'm even worthy of a relationship. Even in the case that marriage *was* plausible... That would be *her* decision first, as I would never want to put her in a position that she felt uncomfortable with-"

Suddenly, Roy was cut off by something that shocked both him and Edward. Riza had kissed him. It was small and gentle, but no less meaningful. Roy's eyes widened, and before he had much time to respond, Riza pulled back, giving a small pained expression.

It wasn't like she didn't understand what he was talking about. She felt the same as him when it came to dating and relationships. Often, she questioned if she would have even been capable of maintaining one, or if she even deserved to. So they were the same in that regard. Even so, hearing Roy talk about himself being unworthy wasn't any less unpleasant despite knowing that.

As if knowing what she was thinking, Roy looked away guiltily. Seeing the expression on Riza's face had been hard for him to look at.

And it was clear: They both wanted to be together, but not only the laws were interfering, but also their own personal insecurities.

They would have, most certainly, gotten in trouble had the military found out, but Roy wasn't the type that would tell about something like that. And they were the only ones inside the building aside from Caspar and some old guy that appeared to be sleeping next to his meal on the other side of the restaurant. So they would, fortunately, be fine, and Riza knew that. That was why she had to let him know right then and there how she felt, even if wasn't with words.

"So..." Caspar turned to Edward. "Do *you* have somebody you like?"

It took Edward, who had turned away out of awkwardness, a moment before he realized he was talking to him.

"H-huh?" He choked on his spit at the sudden question.

"As a matter of fact, he does." Roy said, happy to divert the attention away from himself. "'Winry', was it?"

"Oh, yeah, you two were pretty close when you were living in Resembool, right?" Riza inquired, a thoughtful look on her face.

Edward's face heated up at the topic of his childhood friend, whom he had always had a bit of a crush on. "Hey, it's nothing like that, we're just friends is all!"

"Now, now, no need to be so *modest*, *Fullmetal*." Roy smirked, as he rested his elbow on the table, laying his cheek in the palm of his hand. "It's perfectly fine if you like her. You don't have to hide it."

"Shut up! I'm *not hiding anything*...!" Edward denied, pouting, before giving a small smile, a hint of sadness in his eyes. "Besides, I wouldn't be any good for her. She deserves better than I could *ever* offer her..."

In reality, he did like Winry. A lot. She had often been there to push him and his brother forward; to motivate them, when they didn't know how to motivate themselves. Furthermore, she was strong. Stronger than he would ever be. Undeniably, he greatly respected her.

But Edward knew that he'd hurt her, by constantly going off for long periods of time, and shutting her out, even though he did it to protect her. Furthermore, he was constantly damaging and destroying the top quality automail she always put so much hard work into making for him.

Winry didn't deserve that. She didn't deserve a mess as a partner, and as far as he knew, she didn't even like him like that anyway.

And even if she *did*, there was the issue of the cutting. What kind of person would want somebody with so many scars; to deal with somebody that had so many problems?

"You're wrong..." Roy murmured. "You may have made a few mistakes, but you're not a bad person. Your conscience is clean. That's not something many people can say about themselves these days..."

It was clear that Roy was thinking about himself and the fact that he'd had his own hands stained. In some sense, he seemed to be expressing respect for Edward.

Edward was surprised - it was the last thing he'd expected *him*, of all people, to tell him.

"Even so," Riza decided to give her own input. "you still have a ways to go before you should even be thinking about anything like relationships or marriage, young man."

"Yeah, you've still got your whole life ahead of you." Roy added. "And also, I'd suggest to focusing on getting a little taller first, before you try to get with a *woman*..."

While Roy wasn't being serious and was more referring to Edward needing to get older and grow up a little before he made a decision to be with somebody, Edward wasn't amused in the slightest. He was certain that Roy had done it for the sole purpose of mocking him and pissing him off.

"Calm down, Edward..." Riza sighed, as Edward began to lunge out at Mustang. She grabbed him by the collar, holding him back.

Mustang edged back, unable to keep from gloating and laughing a bit as Edward hissed out obscenities like "Let me at him!" and "I dare you to call me short again and see what happens!"

Of course, Mustang was only laughing until he got kicked flat in the face by Edward...

...

Riza and Roy had came to the market, to get several items and had got Edward to come along in case he wanted something. Said boy had started to climb up onto a shelf, trying to reach a box of cereal, when he felt hands lift him from under his arms.

"Hey!" Edward snapped as he was placed back on the floor by Roy. It certainly didn't help that his cuts were hurting like hell.

"Here." Roy said simply, holding out the box of cereal.

"I could've gotten it myself, you know...!" Edward muttered, averting his gaze.

"And you could have also caused everything to fall." Roy told him flatly. Of course, he didn't admit that he was acually partially worried about Edward's safety, given that the shelf seemed to be swaying a bit. If Edward would have stepped up any higher, it would have, without a doubt, fallen over, and taken the poor soul with it.

"Yeah, well if I had, I would have just fixed it...!" Edward argued back, not seeing a problem.

"With what? Alchemy? Is that really your answer to everything, Ed?" Roy scoffed.

"*No*!" Edward knew there were things that alchemy couldn't do, like saving a life, but it was something that he used a lot, no doubt. A certain part of him felt elated at being called his nickname by Roy, but it was somehow frustrating all the same.

"What are you two arguing about this time...?" Riza asked, walking around the corner and meeting up with them.

"He started it by nagging at me." Edward accused, pointing a finger.

"I simply was telling him he shouldn't be climbing on shelves, because he could knock something down."

"It *is* a little dangerous, Edward." Riza said, not seeing fault with what Roy was saying.

"Whatever..." Edward muttered, throwing the box of cereal, the only thing he'd gotten, into the basket. He'd been irrationally irritable the past couple of days, and he didn't even know why. Not to mention that his anxiety had once again built up in his system, even if he had only just cut two days before. "Hey, Mustang, can I get the key to the house?"

As Roy reached into his pocket to pull out said item, Riza seemed more surprised than *he* did. "You're going back?"

"Yeah, I'm kind of tired." Edward said, a bit sheepishly, trying to dismiss himself. It wasn't a lie. He did feel light headed and a bit dizzy due to the recent blood loss.

"You sure? You don't want anything else?" Riza asked.

"Yeah, I'll be fine." Edward smiled.

Roy had started to hand Edward the key, before he noticed a tinge of red on Edward's white glove.

"Hang on. Are you bleeding?" he asked. Though the words were ones of concern, they were laced with unintentional harshness. Edward momentarily froze up, noticing the blood himself, as he quickly stepped back. Some of the wounds must have reopened and bled through with how he'd been rubbing at his cuts so much.

"*No*... I mean yes. But it's not that bad or anything." Edward looked away, holding his arm back.

"Fullmetal, what happened?" Roy asked. This time, it wasn't as stern and showed he wasn't mad, at the least.

Edward felt sick to his stomach, feeling their eyes on him.

"Edward...?" Riza inquired, reaching out to check his arm.

"I told you it's nothing..." Edward pulled back, before she could touch him. "It was the fight I got into with Kanon last week. One of the wounds reopened is all. I have some bandage wrap back at the house, so I'll cover it up with that."

His response, of course, had been the first believable explanation that came to mind, but it had Edward mentally cursing himself more than before. He didn't like lying about others, but Kanon wasn't here to say that he was lying, so it was what he felt he needed at the moment. And it was certainly better than the alternative.

"Edward, if you're hurt that badly, you should allow one of us to-" Riza started to reach out again to touch Edward's shoulder, but he reflexively jerked away again, taking her aback.

"Hey! I said I'm fine...!" He was scared and startled by the physical contact, not wanting her to see the cuts, before catching himself in his behavior. Feeling guilty for snapping at her when she had no ill intentions, he turned his head away. "Sorry..."

With that, he walked off towards the front of the building to leave.

"Well, that was a little odd..." Riza mused.

Roy was no less baffled by the boy's insistence on not wanting to be touched. "You're telling *me*..."

...

Edward rushed into the bathroom at their borrowed house, locking the door, He felt his anxiety boiling inside of him.

He could have been caught!

His breathing was becoming erratic.

Over the past few days, Edward had been finding himself becoming more depressed at the though of everything going back to normal after the week was over, like none of it had happened. Multiple times, he couldn't help but wonder despite all that they had told him:

What did Riza and Roy *really* think of him...?

Looking down at his glove which was quickly becoming more and more bloody, he took it off, throwing it aside. He would use his alchemy to mess with the blood later. Seeing the crimson flowing down his arm from a particularly narrow, but deep, gash that he'd overlooked before, he was once unable to stop himself from acting on the urge. He told himself that he would only do it for a little while.

He knew that cutting would never fill the hole in his chest left behind by his father, nor the loneliness at knowing his mother was forever gone and that he would never see her again. It would never make up for all trouble and suffering he'd caused Alphonse, and it certainly couldn't give back the life of Nina, whom he'd failed to save. Nor could it take back what happened to Hughes, because of him...

It couldn't truly get rid of the emptiness and loneliness he often felt when he was by himself, but it didn't matter, because it was addictive and at least temporarily eased the burden, even if only a little.

At some point, he cut much deeper than intended, blood pouring from the deep laceration on his wrist. Yet, even as his arm became more and more numb due to nerve damage, and his body weaker and heavier, it wasn't enough. He couldn't bring himself stop. He didn't *want* to. He wanted *more*. He *needed* more.

Even when his legs finally gave in and he collapsed, his body unable to hold up anymore, he still kept trying to reach out for the blade that had fallen several feet from his grasp, before finally, things became too fuzzy and his senses began to fade.

...
When Roy and Riza reached the house after paying for their groceries, Roy knocked several times on the front door, waiting for a response. When Edward didn't answer, Roy decided that Edward wasn't going to open the door, and sat the bags down in his arms, so he could reach into his pocket and take out a spare key that he'd gotten a couple days before from Caspar, unlocking it with that.

As they entered, they put the stuff up where it belonged, before Roy walked towards the bathroom, soon followed by Riza.

"Fullmetal, are you in there?" Roy called out, knocking on the door. When there was no response, a sick consternation swept over him. He was certain that Edward was in the bathroom and that was what was worrying him. "I'm coming in."

In that moment, Roy reached out, grasping the door knob. Turning it, he discovered that it was locked. Without hesitance, he threw his weight into the wood to bust open the door,

partially knocking it off its hinges(something he would have to worry about later).

His eyes immediately widened in alert at the sight in front of him. Lying on the hardwood floor, pale as could be, his flesh arm covered in too many cuts and scars to count was Edward. Blood had poured out around him, a razor blade not too far away from him.

"Oh my god..." Riza didn't want to believe it.

"I've had my suspicions for a while, but I had really hoped it wasn't true." Roy said grimly.

In an instant, he rushed to his side, feeling for a pulse. It was there, but it was weak. He began to shake him, trying to get him to open his eyes. "Edward..., can you hear me? Wake up...!"

No...

His usual calm exterior was quickly cracking, a desperate expression consuming his facial features, as he sat Edward up, leaning him against his chest.

I can't lose you, least of all like this*!*

"Sir, I'll go call an ambulance." Riza said with urgency. She was just as upset, but was trying her best to hold herself together.

"Please, do that..." Roy frantically grabbed a dark blue towel from the nearby linen shelf, wrapping it around Edward's arm to keep pressure on the wounds, as Riza stepped out of the room.

"I'm sorry..."

Roy's eyes snapped wide open at hearing Edward's voice. The boy's golden eyes were weakly gazing up at him. He looked like he was on the verge of tears.

Roy shook his head slightly as he spoke in as gentle of a voice as he could manage:

"Don't apologize. Just stay awake, okay...?" Roy felt like there was a lump in his throat.

Edward was a little confused as to why Roy looked so worried. The expression didn't fit him. Seeing it didn't feel real. It wasn't what he was used to or had expected.

His eyes widened a bit when he was pulled into a sudden tight embrace. Roy held onto Edward like a parent clinging to their child, as if he was afraid that if he let go of him now, he would disappear right before his eyes and that he would never have the opportunity to hold him again. "Things are going to be alright, Ed. I swear it."

More than anything, Roy tried his hardest to believe the words that had came out of his own mouth.

Edward *wished* he could believe it.

...

A/N: I hope this is satisfactory and not TOO bad. D'x;;;;

As Thick as Blood

Story: It is What it is, Chapter 8
Disclaimer: I don't own FMA

Sometimes, it's very hard to remember that Edward is actually Riza's superior. (haha.)

I'm back, but I haven't been able to write a lot, because I now have a worker coming out to get me and taking me places. I'm also soon going back to school, so I'm preparing for that. And, unfortunately, the doctor didn't want to cooperate, so I'm stuck with a constant headache and drowsiness(as well as stomach problems) still and unfortunately, Ibuprofen and Peptobismol isn't doing much at all for me *sobs* (and my hypothyroidism certainly isn't helping me feel any more energetic). I was also saving up the credit on Swagbucks so I could get some amazon gift cards to get a Fullmetal Alchemist bag, since my normal bag has food smashed in it. It shipped off and is headed here, I'm rather excited to receive it.

All that aside, I'm also looking for a job, which is basically becoming an act of congress, since I don't have a high school diploma.

Needless to say, there's a lot going on and I'd like to thank all of you for being so patient with me.

Nextly, in regards to this chapter, I hope Roy doesn't seem out of character or anything, this chapter is fully based off of personal experience (more than some of the others, so try to be understanding.) (There's an author's note explaining everything at the end of the chapter.)

Beep.

Edward had never particularly liked hospitals that much. But if there was one specific thing he hated about it, it was the waiting. The silence. The pure consternation and anxiety.

Beep.

Occasionally, he could hear people walking by outside the door.

Nobody had said anything for the past thirty minutes and it was driving him crazy.

Were they mad at him? He knew they were disappointed in him, at the least, after the shit he'd pulled.

Beep.

The only sound that could be heard in his hospital room was the beeping of the machines. He'd had a blood transfusion a short while ago, and most of the color had returned to his skin, but mentally, he wasn't feeling that much better. His arm had been bandaged and he had been given a short sleeve hospital gown to wear. Feeling exposed, he'd used a quilt to wrap it around himself and hide his arm from sight, including his own.

One of the nurses had wanted to take his automail from him to prevent him from harming himself any further, but Roy had surprisingly been the one who said, "That won't be necessary."

Maybe he knew that if Edward really wanted to hurt himself badly enough again, he would find a way, so taking his automail from him would be pointless.

He didn't face them.

Especially not when Roy finally spoke, breaking the silence after what felt like hours.

"Explain." the man said in a tone of voice that came out harsher than intended.

In all honesty, a part of Roy couldn't help but feel a certain responsibility for this; for not speaking up on his suspicions sooner.

Perhaps, it had been pride that had stopped him from stepping out of his comfort level to truly confront him on his strange behavior. Perhaps, he didn't want to believe it was the truth, so he simply dismissed it. Perhaps, he'd been too afraid of dredging up bad memories of his own past. Or, maybe, part of him simply hadn't wanted to get involved, because he felt that Edward should have somehow been able to fix the problem on his own. More than likely, it had been a mix of all of them, but Roy knew that his reasoning had been selfish and he couldn't just turn away anymore. Seeing Edward covered in blood made him realize just how scared he was of losing the kid.

He had been pure lucky that he arrived as soon as he did, he knew this.

Had it been any later and Edward could have *died. Hell,* he probably *would* have.

And now that the memory was still fresh in mind, haunting him, he was determined to face him and confront him once and for all.

After all, Edward was still alive and right before him. He still had a chance to save him, and he would do what he could in his power to prevent things from ever getting to such a point again.

"Explain what?" Edward muttered. He knew what Roy was talking about, but, for one, he didn't like Roy's tone, and secondly, and didn't want to talk about his feelings.

"You know what he's referring to, Edward..." Riza said, in softer voice than Roy would have offered. However, even though she didn't want to be overbearing about this and wanted to try to be as understanding as possible, she couldn't condone this any more than Roy did.

"I don't want to talk to him about it." Edward said, barely above a whisper.

Riza could immediately tell by the look in Roy's eyes that he was about to say something he'd surely end up regretting, so, once again, she took the initiative.

"...I can only *begin* to imagine what you must have been feeling to do that do that to yourself. And I know that talking about your emotions has never been easy for you, but you can't keep bottling things up like this." She said.

As a solider, she had seen a lot of blood in her life, but that didn't *ever* make it any easier to stomach witnessing something like *that*.

What made it frustrating was that she had known that something was wrong for a while, and the signs were so painstakingly obvious; insistence on wearing long sleeves, flinching at physical contact and so many other things. It should have immediately been a dead give-away.

However, now that she knew what was going on, she had to stop focusing on what she'd failed to do in the past and focus on the present and a way to prevent it from happening again in future. Her position and status be damned - she knew that she *couldn't* just stand back and do nothing, while Edward was suffering to the point of hurting himself. No, she *refused* to.

"Look, I made a mistake, okay? I cut too deep, I admit. But it won't happen again." Edward said, not seeing a problem with his actions.

"That's not-" *the issue*, Riza tried to say, but was cut off by Roy.

"You're right, Ed, it *won't* happen again." he said simply. "Because *we're* not going to *allow* it to, and from this point on, you are going to be under our supervision 24/7, until further notice."

"I don't want a *babysitter*." Edward retorted.

"Well, that's too bad," Roy said coldly. "because, apparently, you *need* one."

"No, I *don't*!" Edward shouted, turning to glare at him. Being monitored by Roy meant Alphonse was, without a doubt, going to find out about his cutting. And it also meant that he would have to put further hold on getting Alphonse's body back.

Riza really didn't like where this was going, nor the way Roy was speaking to Edward, but she knew that the issue couldn't be avoided, considering that Edward didn't even see an issue with cutting himself. Of course she would step in if Roy started acting or speaking in ways that she didn't approve of.

Roy got up and Edward started to edge back in a subconscious fear. Was he going to hit him for shouting at him? It wouldn't be the first time that he had got physical in one of their disputes.

However, instead of hitting him, Roy simply ripped off his covers and grabbed the boy's hand, pulling his arm out to expose all of the bandages and some of the scars.

"Look at yourself, Ed. You've been ripping your own skin to shreds, to the point you even passed out. This right here is *proof* that you need *help*." Roy said, as a matter-of-factly. "Do you *really* not see a problem with it?"

"*No*..." Edward muttered bitterly in denial. It was his *own* business what he did to himself. As long as he wasn't trying to kill himself, it didn't matter. And why was Roy getting so involved anyway?

Roy sighed, but was trying his best to be patient. "Tell me this much. What does cutting yourself *do* for you?" He desperately wanted to know.

"...It's none of your business..." Edward grumbled. He really didn't want to talk about it. It wasn't like either one of them could understand, anyway.

Roy sighed. He really was trying his best, but it was pretty apparent that Edward wasn't going to open up to him without a push.

"Fine." Roy said, letting go of Edward's arm. "If you won't tell *me*, then I'm sure you'll be willing to explain this to your *brother instead*."

Riza was about to protest to Roy's idea of getting Alphonse involved in this right away, but stopped when Edward quickly reached out, nearly falling off the bed as he grabbed onto Roy's sleeve, when the man started to walk off, presumably towards the telephones.

"Wait! Please..." the boy murmured desperately, letting his hair cover his eyes. The next words that came out of his mouth were barely above a whisper, but no less strong of a plea. "Don't tell Al..."

He sounded like he was on the verge of tears.

"Then you *will* answer my question." Roy said sternly.

Edward's eyes widened slightly at hearing the subtle threat, before narrowing in frustration.

More than anybody else, Alphonse was the *last* person he wanted to find out, least of all right now. His brother wasn't usually the type to hold a grudge, but there was no way he *wouldn't* be at least a *little* mad at Edward for lying to him. And Edward didn't like Alphonse when he was angry, which was why it scared him so much.

He knew that he was probably going to find out eventually anyway, but Edward was willing to prolong the inevitable no matter what the costs.

And after all trouble and worry he had caused them, he knew they had deserved some kind of answer. It was the best bet to simply cooperate, because he didn't doubt Roy for one instance.

Even so, what was he supposed to say?

Any answer he could have given them would have sounded downright stupid and there was no short explanation as to why he cut himself. There were so many reasons he did it. He

couldn't narrow it down to one, just as he couldn't put a single name to his feelings half the time.

He could feel their eyes on him, in expectation.

He moved back, letting go of Roy's sleeve.

"It distracts me..." he finally mumbled. While, sure, it wasn't the *only* reason, it was *something*.

"From what...?" Roy asked in as soft of a voice as he could manage, even though it still came off gruff and sharp, causing Edward to slightly pull in on himself in response to the older man's harsh tone.

"...Everything." Edward admitted vaguely, feeling like there was a lump in his throat.

There was nothing in specific he could name. And it was true. When he cut, he wanted to focus only on the pain, not anything else. It wasn't just one factor leading to it, after all, it was too many things to count.

"How does it make you feel... to cut?" Riza suddenly asked.

"...I don't really know how to explain it, but there's a sort of rush I sometimes get. When I'm holding the blade, I feel in control of something for once and it's exhilarating... Watching the blood... It detaches me from my feelings, my situation, my surroundings and everything. It clears my head so I don't have to think." Edward described it the only way he knew how.

And suddenly, he felt sick. Did they think he was crazy after saying such things? Were they going to judge him? Were they going to shun him? Would they even want to be associated with him anymore?

Despite his anxiety, however, it was actually quite easy for them to understand what he was saying.

Edward was just a kid that had been through a lot of hardships in his life, and had faced so much pain and unpredictability on the path he'd chosen. He was only bound to try to find a way to get a sense of regulation eventually. It was simply unfortunate that this would be the lengths he went to get it.

"You know..." Roy murmured in a grim and solemn voice, deep in thought, averting his gaze. "I once did the same thing."

Edward looked up at him, shocked by the implication. Riza, on the other hand, had a knowing look on her face and opted to look away.

"I didn't know how to cope with having taken so many lives during the war. But thanks to Hughes and Hawkeye, and several others, I was able to realize that harming myself wasn't getting me anywhere. It was only getting in the way of my goals and life."

At that moment, he met Edward's eyes. "I don't know how long you've been doing this, but I'd be damned if I allowed you to continue going down the same path that I barely managed to pull away from. The Rockbells didn't put so much hard work into crafting your automail for you to *hurt* yourself. They did it for you to *protect* yourself. So keep your chin up and stand tall, Fullmetal. You may think things are bleak now, and, it's true, things may get worse, but you will always have people that are there for you, people who have supported you from the beginning. Don't you *dare* lose sight of them."

"He's right, you know." Riza gave a small smile, catching the blonde's attention. "And you may not see it now, but your life is precious, Edward."

Edward's eyes widened at their words. It was then that he realized:

His attachment to Roy and Riza wasn't completely a recent thing. It had always been there.

Several times in the past, just like now, Roy had given him hope when everything seemed bleak. Likewise, Riza, while also having a slightly strict side herself, was soft-spoken, a little like his mother, and had always managed to somehow boost his sense of self-worth even when it was at it's lowest. Both of them were equally encouraging in their own ways.

For the first time in his life, now, thanks to *them,* something in the boy genuinely wanted to stop cutting.

Yet doubt still plagued his mind. He found himself wondering if it was even *possible* to. The sheer optimism reminded him of Alphonse.

"...I've never understood how you or Al can keep looking forward and even succeed in encouraging others when everything seems so hopeless. There are times I've really envied you guys for that..."

"You're a lot stronger than you think, kid..." Roy offered.

"Yes," Riza said, having got up herself. She reached out, tenderly grabbing Edward's arm. "this right here is proof of your perseverance. It's a symbol of your struggle to *survive*. Even so, being strong doesn't mean you have to do everything alone. Roy and I both care for you, and so does your brother and everybody around you. You will always have people that you can rely on."

Edward looked down at hearing her words, almost as if in shame.

"Edward," Riza murmured, now rubbing circles into his hand. "if I may, I'm going to make a selfish request of you."

"What is it?" Edward couldn't bring himself to face her, after realizing how much pain and worry he'd caused them.

"The next time you get to the point where you're considering hurting yourself again, I want you to at least come to one of us. Can you do that for me?" Riza asked in a soft voice. Edward was silent for a long time, pondering it. But eventually he gave in.

"...I'll try..." he said in a weak voice, barely stronger than a whisper. He hoped they wouldn't be upset with him for not being able to give them an absolute answer or make any promises.

"I wouldn't ask for anything more." Riza gave his hand a small reassuring squeeze, noticing the look in his eyes.

"Colonel...," Edward mumbled.

"Hm?"

"Thanks... For telling me."

"Don't mention it..."

Edward didn't have to thank Riza for her to know that he appreciated her efforts just as much.

They all fully understood that this was going to be a hard road to tow, and Roy and Riza still didn't know everything that was leading to the cutting or all that Edward was upset about, but that was just something that they would have to work with and figure out as they got him to open up, no matter how long that may take. There would definitely be setbacks along the way, and Edward would probably have relapses at some points, but that was something they were fully prepared to face together.

As a family, regardless of blood.

...

A/N: This chapter was extremely hard for me to write because of how tired I am... But I hope it's satisfying none the less.

Sorry it's so short! D':

Self-harm may seem out of character for Roy, but it's actually exactly what I went through with my father figure... I feared him finding out that I self-harmed, and was afraid of him judging me, but when he did find out, he told me what he had went through and that he used to do the same thing. He is one of the few people in my life that helped me stop, so this chapter is fully based off of that personal experience. Of course their personalities aren't completely the same(though they are a little alike), and I had to take that into consideration when writing this, but the base idea is still there. I hope it's not a turn-off or anything. It's not a present issue for Roy anymore in this context, it was simply a part of his past that has made him stronger in the long run.

Also, the reason Riza didn't suspect self-harm isn't quite specified. My mother figure this is based off of didn't really suspect it either (even though she already knew that I had past experiences with it), but after she found out, she was very concerned, and was more understanding than the majority of the people in my life was.

Speaking of which, I hope it doesn't feel like I'm short handing Riza in this at all. I definitely plan to have some development between her and Edward as well soon.

By the way, if anybody has been keeping up with my fanfiction called "Melancholy" (which is actually part of what this one was inspired from(aside from my interpersonal issues anyway), I've misplaced my phone, which had my document for it, so that story may be put on hiatus until I can find it. Sorry!

Slowly Moving Forward

As a note to everybody: I'll be going back into school tomorrow (well, actually today , because I should be asleep, as it's nearly 1 AM!), and will soon be starting a job, so the majority of my schedule will probably be wacked, especially if I start doing weekend hours, but I promise that I will try to keep this story going. :D

Sorry this chapter is so short again, I've just been going through a lot. D'x

By the way, I had some people compliment on the color of Edward's eyes in this. It may come off kind of... romantic, but that's not the intentions *at all*! People(including my mom and various others) have complimented my blue eyes so many times it's not even funny. Heck, I don't even like my eyes that much, but I LOVE the color of Edward's eyes, so I applied my own experience to him. Forgive me if it seems out of place. It's happened at the most random and inopportune moments for me as well.

...

"Are you Edward?"

At hearing a female's voice calling out his name, Edward, who'd been trying to sleep, looked over his shoulder to see a middle-aged woman standing there.

"Yeah, that's me." the blonde said, subconsciously a bit skeptical.

"Hi, Edward." The woman smiled. "My name is Sternin. I'm going to be your doctor for today. How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine, I guess." Edward sat up, figuring she was there to do some kind of check up.

"I'm going to check your blood pressure, heartbeat, and a couple other things if you're okay with that." Sternin told him.

"Alright." Edward said.

Additionally to checking his blood pressure and heartbeat, Sternin also listened to his lungs, having him do a couple breathing exercises.

After they were done, Sternin once again smiled. "Alright, everything seems normal. Are you currently on any medications?"

"*No*, and I don't want to take any *either*." Edward muttered.

"Be nice, Edward." Riza lightly scolded him.

"I'm just saying. Leave it up to the doctors and they'll put me on a whole *ton* of unnecessary medicines..." Edward reasoned. After that, he was asked things like his birthdate, any

allergies he had, and a couple other questions, which Edward was able to answer with little to no issue.

Until it reached that undesirable topic that Edward didn't want to discuss. "So I hear you did quite the armwork there."

"Yeah, sorta..." Edward immediately grew tense.

"Want to tell me a little bit about that?" Sternin asked.

"No..." Edward said, his face heating up at how awkward he was feeling.

"Are you his parents?" Sternin looked to Roy and Riza.

Roy didn't bother hiding the truth.

"No, but we are in charge of him. I'm Colonel Roy Mustang, and this is my Lieutenant, Riza Hawkeye. Perhaps you've heard of us. We came here to Kreta undercover, and I had him come with us." He pulled out and flashed his proof.

"Oh, you're in the military? I had no idea. Forgive my lack of respect, sir." Sternin apologized.

"Don't apologize. It's a common mistake." Roy shook his head. This seemed to be a frequent reaction a lot of people gave when they found out Roy was in the military, if it wasn't the complete opposite response.

"So are... you in the military as well?" Sternin asked Edward.

"Yeah, I'm a major." Edward answered.

"Aren't you a little... young?" Sternin inquired a little uncertainly.

"Maybe..." Edward said, thinking about it. "But there's something I have to do, so I can't quit until I achieve my goal."

"Whatever this goal of yours is, it must be very important to you." Sternin noted.

"Yeah... If I don't complete it, I'll never be able to truly face my brother again..." Edward looked away, guilt present in his eyes.

"Has anybody ever told you that you have the prettiest eye color?" Sternin wanted to know, suddenly changing the subject. Maybe it was some attempt to distract Edward or lighten up the mood.

"H-huh?" Edward almost choked at the sudden question. It wasn't the first time somebody had complimented his eyes(in fact, his mom used to do it sometimes too), and even random people he had met at points, but it was no less awkward and embarrassing.

Furthermore, being called a feminine term like 'pretty' only caused him to become *more* flustered.

"He really does." Riza echoed, offering a small smile when she noticed the blush on his face.

"What are they? Gold?" Sternin wanted to know, scrutinizing his irises.

"Something like that. Anyway, can we talk about something else please?" Edward dismissed it in a fidgety manner, before *Roy* had that chance to start as well.

It wasn't like he even saw anything that spectacular about them to begin with anyway. After all, the *homunculi* had *purple* eyes.

Not that he particularly cared to think or talk about *them*.

"Of course. Do you have any questions for me?" Sternin wanted to know.

"Yeah, I was wondering what's going to happen...? Since I..." Edward started to ask, but couldn't bring himself to finish. And as it turns out, he didn't need to.

"You'll be coming back with us." Roy answered him, right as Sternin was about to speak.

Riza briefly glanced over at him, having thought for sure that Roy would have had plans to get him admitted, to which she wasn't even sure she would have been opposed to or not at this point.

After hearing Roy's stance, Sternin decidedly didn't get involved. If it had only been Edward, he would have been involuntarily admitted to a psychological institution without question, but if a Military Colonel was essentially ordering for Edward to leave, she knew that she couldn't get in the way of that.

(I'm not entirely sure how dictatorships work, but I imagine the Military has the ultimate say in most things, and I did this for the sake of convenience. Having Edward in a hospital hours away from his home would be a huge issue for me, even if it was only for a short while. And I do have other reasons I'm doing this, that are similar to my own personal experience.)

"Under normal circumstances, you would have been sent away without a second thought, so you're lucky that *I'm* here, kid." Roy told Edward.

Roy understood quite well that those kind of places didn't truly offer any helpful advice to unwilling patients anyway, and, personally, he didn't like them to begin with. For the time being, it was more important that Edward realize he had people who would support him, and find a reason to *want* recovery in the first place.

After all, Hughes probably would have also suggested the same thing.

If he had just signed over control to them, it would have basically been shirking off responsibility of the boy's welfare to somebody else; Roy refused to do that.

That wasn't to say that he didn't have plans to eventually admit Edward for psychological evaluation, but that certainly wasn't going to be today, and it would be something he and Edward would have to discuss at some other time. Besides, between him and Riza and even some of his other men if necessary, he was sure they could work something out for the time being.

Edward listened, but didn't say much of anything. He wouldn't have blamed Roy if he had, but it was no less of a relief to hear that he wasn't going to have to be stuck at an institution for possible weeks on end.

"Even so," Sternin decided to interject. "I would like to request that he be kept here for 48 hours for surveillance. Sorry, it's precautionary routine in cases like this."

"I fully understand. Do what you have to as a doctor." Roy offered a small smile.

Sternin started to return the gesture, before somebody knocked on the door.

"Come in." Sternin said.

The door opened and another man with a tray of food was standing there. "I have Edward Elric's tray. Can I give it to him?"

"Yes, please. I'm sure he's hungry by now." Sternin said, nodding.

As they were situating and the doctor and man began to leave, Riza turned to Roy.

"Colonel, do you want me to go to the cafeteria and pick up something for us to eat?" she asked.

"Yes, that would be appreciated." Roy said, before he started to reach into his pocket to grab his wallet. "Hold on, let me get the money."

"Don't." Riza placed a hand on his shoulder. "I can cover it, sir."

Roy's eyes widened a bit, taken aback, before he shook his head. "No, keep it. There's no way I could put that responsibility on you. I said that I would cover food expenses and I meant it."

"Well, if it's no trouble..." Riza said, uncertainly.

"Of course it's none. Here." Roy reassured, as he handed her a fair amount of *cens*.

"Thank you, sir."

"Don't mention it."

It was after Riza had left the room that Roy had noticed Edward playing with his food but not making an effort to eat it.

Edward usually had no issue eating, but when his stress levels reached their limits, he would sometimes loose his appetite.

He couldn't stop thinking about Alphonse and how he was sure to react after finding out the truth. Numerous possibilities kept playing through his head, spiraling his anxiety.

"Is something the matter?"

Edward slightly jumped at hearing him, before turning away, feeling a little bitter.

"It's nothing." he dismissed.

"You're not a very good liar, kid."

"I'm not lying..." Edward pouted, but he had found his resolve sink a bit as he recalled that Hughes had once told him the same thing as Roy had.

"I'm not going to judge you." Roy said in a voice that almost lacked it's usual harshness as he glanced away. Edward was taken aback by it.

Roy was genuinely trying to get him to open up to him. The boy didn't know what to think.

"Are you still planning to tell Al...?" Edward murmured, unable to face him.

"No, I'm not. *You* are." Roy said.

Of course, Edward's worries only increased at hearing that. Facing Alphonse himself was even scarier than the thought of Roy or Riza doing the talking.

But he knew it would only be selfish and petty of him to ask for them to face his problems for him. So he refused to do that.

"He's going to be so angry at me..." Edward muttered, barely above a whisper.

"Is that what you really think?" Roy inquired, taken aback at his cynicism.

Edward looked up at him, wondering what Roy had to say.

"Alphonse may be upset at first, it's true, but he cares about you, so he'll try to understand. That's just the type of person he is." Roy stated his thoughts.

However, it was evident on Edward's face that he still had his doubts.

Naturally, Roy didn't know Alphonse as well as Edward, but Alphonse had never once struck him as the type to get 'angry' over something like *this.* Alphonse, on the overall, had a more gentle and optimistic demeanor than himself or Riza, Edward no less. As such, he seemed like one who would try be more understanding than any of them.

Of course, Alphonse had once snapped at Edward for being reckless and nearly throwing away his life during their fight with Scar, and Roy had heard rumors about Edward's and Alphonse's argument over Alphonse's body, so that wasn't to say that the boy never had outbursts. However, Alphonse typically understood how to reason with Edward better than anybody.

"But let's say he *does* get upset. The lieutenant and I will be there for you. We're not going to just leave you like that." Roy assured him.

Edward didn't know what to think at hearing that, but looked away sadly. It would be childish and selfish of him to put so much reliance on them.

"No... This is something that is between me and Al. There's no need for you to get involved, Colonel."

"You're wrong, Ed. This is between *all* of us. And no matter how long it takes, no matter how hard it may be, we are going to work through all of this. Now eat." Roy told him.

After a moment, Edward surprisingly decided to listen to Roy for the time being, not pressing his true feelings further.

...

"You know, it's funny..."

"What is?"

Roy looked up at Riza, who was gazing at him with inquisitive eyes. He then gave a small saddened smirk, deep in thought as he looked back over at Edward, who was dead asleep on the stretcher. "I've never really wanted kids before, but when it pertains to him and his brother, a part of me doesn't mind the prospect of looking after them every now and then."

He looked turned back to meet Riza's eyes. "Is that strange?"

Had Edward been awake, there was no way Roy would have been so open with her in front of him, much less about such a topic, but since he wasn't, he felt a certain calmness with her that he couldn't explain.

And Riza felt the same. She couldn't deny the protective instinct that was developing within her pertaining to Edward and Alphonse as well.

Even though she wasn't trying to replace Trisha, a small part of her genuinely did want to be there for him all the same. And she didn't have any regrets for feeling that way.

She shook her head, offering a small smile of her own. "No, not at all."

...

A/N: I hope this chapter was good enough, and doesn't seem too rushed. I swear I tried! TwT

ALPHONSE* SHOULD *BE COMING BACK IN IN THE NEXT CHAPTER, if not the next. I CAN'T WAIT. I have so much planned for Ed. There's gonna be some angst, and drama, but also some really good development. Ho boy.

Consternation

Story: It Is What It Is, Chapter 10
Disclaimer: I don't own FMA
A/N: I am SOOO sorry that it's been so long. We've been dealing with hurricane Florence, which has caused a lot of damage. The power was out for over a week,(Now my computer is out, so I'm gonna have to use my brother's until I can manage to get mine fixed). Not to mention I have been dealing with my senior project, so I have been super busy. And since we've lost two weeks of school due to the hurricane, things are probably gonna be even more hectic when I get back. w;;;

And I know I said I would have Alphonse this chapter, but I had written up a whole scene with Edward and Alphonse on my own computer, yet since it's gone out, it's going to take a bit longer. *sobs*

This is the last chapter that Ed, Roy and Riza will be Kreta. They're finally gonna be going back to central next chapter.

Anyway, I finally managed to post a chapter. Hahahah...

Though I really feel like I shorthanded Riza in this. I'm not all that proud of this chapter...

Anyway, some people may be wondering why I did what I did last chapter. Ed's an Alchemist, so he could cause all kinds of chaos if he was admitted involuntarily. I think Roy would realize that. So that's another reason why I didn't go the hospitalization route, especially not this soon. And I'm really looking forward to writing the part with Alphonse.

...

...

(I feel like Riza could have been written better in this. I sometimes have a hard time carrying on dialogue between more than two people, so I hope I'm doing okay...

I don't want do what some people do as in simply making Riza stand at Roy's side and that being the end to her character. Even if she will be at his side, I also want her to have her own sense of agency and character, her own interests and hobbies(thus why I did the dart thing earlier in the story) and an equally supportive role in the Elric brothers lives. I honestly love Riza's character, but I feel like some people don't fully grasp her potential and role) I'm really trying here, but it's very hard because I worry so much about keeping things in character. And I swear she WILL have good and supportive moments in the future just like she has throughout the story. So please bear with me.)

...

Forty eight hours, the doctor had said.

Two days and he was *supposed* to be able to leave; was supposed to be able to get back on the road so he could see Alphonse again.

Edward was, by nature, hot-headed and a tad impulsive, alongside several other things; 'patient' most certainly wasn't one of them, especially not in this kind of situation. Due to being under suicide watch, he hadn't even being able to go to the bathroom once without *somebody* lurking over his shoulder!

And once he was sure that forty eight hours had passed, Edward began to become extremely irritated and anxious, his arms itching like hell.

In cases like this, though it wasn't intentional, he also had a very systematic way of thinking. If somebody said a certain number of hours, he set that exact expectation.

"How much longer? Surely, forty eight hours have passed already, haven't they?" Edward groaned, eventually.

"Yes, they have but the doctors have to get your papers together before they can discharge you." Riza explained.

"Well, I hope they hurry..." Edward muttered. He had been in hospitals before and knew how they worked, so he knew he was being petty, but past experience didn't ease his anxieties at all. If anything, it made him more anxious because he knew they could take forever to get to somebody.

"They can't just drop what they're doing and cater to your every wish, Ed. Things like this take time." Roy tried to reason, but came off a little harsh.

"Hey, I wouldn't even *be* here if it weren't for *you* getting this damn hospital involved in the *first* place." Edward spat, glaring. Truthfully, a part of him knew that he was going to make things worse, and that Roy had genuinely been trying in his own way to be supportive. So he didn't really know what he was trying to accomplish by provoking the man, or why he was doing it. Perhaps it was the mixture of boredom and pent up frustration, he subconsciously reasoned. Not that it was offering him any relief. In fact, it had simply made him feel worse.

"And what would *you* have suggested me do differently, Ed?" Roy asked cooly, his eyes narrowing slightly as he closed the magazine he was absentmindedly skimming over. Edward inwardly cringed. He knew that he was about to receive a lecture about how stupid he was for cutting himself, and how it was all his fault he was here. The thing was, Edward *knew* he was to blame, but he didn't want to be reminded of it, much less admit it. "Should I have left you to lose what little blood you had left in your body? Would that have satisfied you?"

"Colonel, stop it." Riza interjected before Edward could respond, not liking where this was going. It was especially bad since Roy had been through the same thing. When she and Hughes had found out what he had been doing to himself, he had, quite frankly, been far *less*cooperative than *Edward* had, albeit in a more passive-aggressive way, but they had been very patient with him regardless. Yet, Roy was going out of his way to carry on a banter with Edward. It was true that Edward *did* need to relax, but Roy saying such things to

Edward in the state of mind that he was most certainly wasn't going to help anything. "and please, try to calm down, Ed. I know this isn't easy for you, but it shouldn't be much longer."

She called him 'Ed' without thinking about it.

After hearing Riza, Edward was conflicted at first, but eventually gave in, uttering a "fine..." beneath his breath.

Roy then sighed, wondering how and why Riza was so good at working with Edward and getting him to cooperate.

And sure enough, it was only fifteen minutes later that a young lady came in.

"Edward Elric?" she asked.

"Yeah, that's me."

"Hello, my name is Cathy. I'm from registration. I need to get some papers signed. Are you his guardians?" the woman turned to Roy and Riza.

"Yes, ma'm." Roy answered in an inquiring tone.

"Can I get a signature from one of you?" She asked, additionally explaining that it was Edward's discharge papers, and that it was to confirm that he was satisfied with Edward's treatment.

"Of course. I'll do it." Roy grinned.

"Thank you." Cathy smiled, handing Roy a pen. She then got Edward to sign as well, which he, fortunately, complied with.

Afterwards, she explained that Sternin had also given him a referral to a psychologist over in Central for a week in advance. Naturally, Edward wasn't happy at hearing that, but kept his mouth shut for the time being to avoid the chance of the hospital trying to keep him longer.

Mustang thanked the woman before she left Edward with his old clothes so he could change.

Riza stepped out of the room, but Roy stayed in case Edward needed his help(and to keep an eye on him).

Edward hissed in pain as he tried to slip on his black long sleeve shirt.

"Here, hold up your arms. I'm sure you can at least do that." Roy said, after taking the shirt from him.

Edward felt degraded, but decided to cooperate. Normally, it would be Alphonse who helped him with this kind of thing if he was hurt.

Come to think of it, all three of them - Riza, Roy, and Alphonse had done so much for him, Winry and Pinako no less. Not to mention that Roy was also ultimately the reason he had met

so many kind people; Ross, Riza, Major Armstrong, Sheska, Nina, Gracia, Elysia, and so many others, especially Hughes...

It was something he'd always known, but he had ignored the thought. However, now that the memory of Hughes was, once again, brought up, something inside of Edward suddenly felt a pang of guilt. Hughes was Roy's best friend, but due to the boy revealing the information he did, Hughes had got killed. Even though the thought was painful, especially since Roy and Riza had been so supportive of him this past week, Edward couldn't help but wonder; did he blame him?

"Is something wrong?" Edward jumped a bit when Roy's voice snapped him out of his thoughts. He had got his clothes changed, but hadn't moved to follow him out the door.

"Hm? No, it's nothing important. Sorry." Edward said a little awkwardly, before heading to the now open slide door. Roy, though unaware of the thoughts and insecurities consuming the boy's mind, could tell that something was bothering him.

As Edward started to pass through the doorway, Roy placed a hand on Edward's shoulder, stopping him. "Are you still worried about your brother...?"

"No, not really," Edward said, before looking away. "Well, I mean, yeah, I am still kind of nervous about how he'll will react when he finds out, but I'll make it. After all, I've got you and the Lieutenant, don't I?"

Edward looked back up at Roy and gave a small smile, which showed that he was truly beginning to trust him, or at least wanting to. Mustang, however, knew that, despite everything, Edward was still holding back. He could see it in his eyes. Furthermore, Edward's tone still rang of doubt, as if he was still questioning if Roy and Riza truly were going to support him.

"Yeah, you do." Roy said, a pained look in his eyes, as he briefly reached up and brushed his hand over Edward's head without thinking. A soft smile then graced his lips when he simply uttered out, "Come on."

Edward had been taken aback at Roy's gesture. It had been completely genuine and lacked the man's usual guile. Edward didn't know why, but something inside of him felt another pang of guilt. It hurt. After everything they had done for him, he had had nothing to offer in return except snide remarks, arguments and insults. More than anything, he wanted to apologize and thank them for everything, but suddenly, the words wouldn't come. It felt like there was a lump in his throat.

"Mn." Edward quietly followed behind, as they met up with Riza, who noticed and recognized the look in both of their eyes.

...

A/N: Next chapter will have Alphonse for sure. (I promise, this time)

Chapter title name suggestions would be appreciated! I can't think of one. ^^

Confrontation

Story: It Is What It Is, Chapter 11
Disclaimer: I don't own FMA.

(IMPORTANT NOTE AT END)

OH, MAN I HOPE THIS WAS GOOD. IT SEEMS SHITTY TO ME (next chapter will be better I swear, I wanted to get closer to the part that everybody has been waiting so long and patiently for)

I've been so busy lately, due to work and school. But I had this evening free, so I decided to write up a little bit. I haven't had anything with Al for a while, so I really needed a little centric-chapter with him (of course with some of Ed too). But it's probably terrible and rushed(not my intentions, but I might not have this opportunity for a while again, especially due to my senior project...)

One night ago

Alphonse was snapped out of his reverie, as he noticed the lights of the kitchen come on. It was probably around 3 AM, and Len was dead asleep in his room last he knew, so he knew it had to be Rachel...

As he got up, he tried his best to avoid waking up the cats near him, but having a suit of armor naturally made soundless movement virtually impossible, and cats had some of the most attentive ears, just like dogs.

Stepping over the cats in the room, he made his way to the kitchen. Sure enough, Rachel was sitting at the table, a wine bottle in her hand. Her face was slightly flushed, like she might have drank a little too much. She looked like she was deep in thought.

"Um..." Alphonse uttered nervously, not sure what to say.

She jumped, a bit startled, as if she hadn't known he was there. She then relaxed a bit.

"Oh, Al... It's you..." she slightly slurred.

"Are you not able to sleep?" Alphonse inquired, as politely as possible and not to sound too prodding.

"Course not..." the woman said simply, but there was an all too familiar look of longing in her eyes, as if she was thinking about something. It immediately reminded him of his mother, who used to look off into the distance a lot in Hohenheim's absence, never talking about her feelings and always telling him and his brother that there was nothing to worry about. He

would be lying if he claimed it wasn't a painful sight to see again. However, before he could ask anything, she changed the subject.

"You goin' back home tomorrow?"

"Yeah... I have too." Alphonse said a little sadly. "I would like stay longer, but my brother is real piece of work sometimes, you know."

Rachel smirked a bit, obviously having heard rumors of the Fullmetal Alchemist. "So I've *heard*. Riza has told me quite a few stories here and there herself about you two. You must deal with a lot."

"You couldn't even *begin* to imagine. He's so thick-headed and never listens to reason. Honestly, I sometimes think *I* should be the older brother..." Alphonse trailed off into silence for a moment, when he remembered how Edward had been complaining about his arm last he saw him, not to mention the occasional looks of sadness he gave when he thought nobody was looking. A small bit of worry began to envelope him. "I just hope he doesn't come back in a cast or something due to breaking his arm or leg in a fight..."

"Hey, I've known Riza for years, and Roy too, so trust me when I say your brother is in good hands," Rachel said, "so cheer up!"

"Mn..." Alphonse uttered, uncertainly. It wasn't that he didn't trust Roy or Riza. It was just that Edward wasn't the type to always cooperate or think things through. Though if something had went that bad, Riza would have probably called them and let them know, so maybe everything was okay after all. Still, it didn't completely settle his anxieties.

"I can tell you care a lot about him." Rachel murmured.

"Yeah, I do..." Alphonse responded, deep in thought. Many people knew Edward as a stubborn and feisty teenager, but Alphonse had been by Edward's side through thick and thin, and understood him better than most. Beneath his tough exterior, Edward was a fragile human being, who was sensitive to rejection, vulnerable to self-blame, and actually very kind-hearted beneath it all. "He may be difficult at times, but I couldn't ask for any other brother. Since mom died and dad left, we're all we have, so he means the world to me."

"That reminds me..." he recalled. "Len said his father died when he was younger..."

Rachel's eyes widened slightly before she briefly averted her gaze. It was then that Alphonse noticed the letter at her side, that he had helped Len write. "Yeah, something like that..."

It was at that moment that Alphonse got an uneasy feeling. Based off her suggestive tone, something didn't seem right.

She trailed off into silence, taking another swig of the alcohol in her hand. "To answer your question, he actually didn't die... That man... He left... with another woman."

Alphonse felt an incomprehensible flurry of conflicting emotions settle over his entire being at the unexpected news. He didn't know what to think.

"Len doesn't know anything about it, and I'd rather him not ever find out." Rachel said, grimly. "It was much easier to tell to tell him his father died and leave it at that, instead of telling him that his father essentially abandoned him..."

Alphonse understood her feelings, but didn't entirely agree with her decision to keep the younger boy in the dark.

"You're wrong, Ms. Rachel..." Alphonse said. Leave it to him to state his mind honestly without a second thought. Although he was never as harsh as Edward, he too had his moments where he wasn't afraid to stand up to somebody. "Len won't always be a kid. You can't hide something like this from him forever. Somebody will eventually tell him, if you don't accidentally let it slip. So I think you should eventually tell him the truth... Whatever he decides to do with it will be up to him, but he *deserves* to know that his father is still alive somewhere, even if you think that man doesn't deserve *him*."

Rachel was silent for a long time before giving a final thought with a saddened smirk.

"Maybe you're right. Che... To think... A child giving *me* a lecture... A damn well good one at that too... You've must've been though a lot, huh...? I really am a shitty mother..."

Alphonse could tell that she wasn't particularly asking for a response and that responses would probably be unnecessary and unwelcome, so he didn't respond. Besides, at this point, he knew this was between her and her son. He needn't get involved.

...

Present time, Central

"Ah, we're finally back... It sure took us long enough. I'm starving!" Edward's voice chimed, as he stretched in the seat of the train they were on, slightly wincing. Roy and Riza followed him off the train smirking a bit at the fact that Edward was hungry even though he'd eaten right before they left. Then again, it had been quite a few hours.

"Brother!" They all turned their head to look at Alphonse, who was running towards them and waving.

"Hello, Alphonse. I hope we didn't keep you waiting long." Riza said politely.

"Mn." Alphonse shook his head. "I just got here. How are you doing, brother? You're not hurt anywhere, are you?"

Immediately, everybody's faces except Alphonse went grim in response to the rhetorical question. Alphonse noticed their reaction and grew a little worried, but decided right now probably wasn't the time to confront it around everybody else, so he decided to put it aside for a little later.

"I missed you so much! You don't know what I've been through!" Alphonse said, picking Edward up in a bear hug. If Alphonse had a body, he might have been crying tears of joy. It

took every ounce of Edward's being to not scream at the pain, so instead he forced himself to smile a bit.

"Hey, I missed you too, Al. But it was only one *week*, so, come on, put me down." Edward laughed. In truth he probably missed Alphonse more than vice versa, but he would never let it be known.

"That's easy for *you* to say, Brother! You weren't the one looking after nineteen cats *all day every day*!" Alphonse retorted childishly.

"Hey, that's funny. I thought you *liked* cats." Edward smirked. Of course Alphonse, didn't actually know the hell that Ed himself had been through over the past few days in the hospital.

"I *do*, but I never want to be put in charge of that many cats again!" Alphonse said.

Riza and especially Roy couldn't help but smirk a bit at the sight of Ed being hugged by his brother. Edward immediately noticed them and his face went beet red. How dare that bastard laugh at him!?

Unfortunately, the positive mood wouldn't last long.

Because when Alphonse finally put Edward down, Edward couldn't bring himself to face his brother and his throat felt constricted. But he knew Roy and Riza weren't going to allow him to get out of this.

"Ed? Is something wrong?" Alphonse asked.

"It's..." Edward trailed off into silence for a long moment, all too aware that everybody's eyes were on him.

However, it wasn't until he felt Riza's hand on his shoulder, that he felt a certain since of reassurance to at least let Alphonse know that something was wrong. He looked up at Riza for a moment, before he gazed back down to his feet. "Al, there's something I... There's something we need to talk about."

...

Sorry it's so short... Hopefully I'll be able to get my other laptop fixed soon...

So as I mentioned I have a very important note to make. Actually, a question.

Edward's undoubtedly gonna have to stay somewhere under supervision for a while, but I don't know if the barracks will be an option anymore.

So I was thinking that I should either make him stay with Roy or Riza (alongside Al too of course), so they can keep an eye on him. But I'm not sure which to go with.

During the day, he would be seeing both of them frequently regardless of who he went with, and if he went to stay with Riza, then Roy would probably come over some times.

Also, as a side note with Riza, there's also Black Hayate. Knowing Ed, he might feel more comfortable with Riza, but I know many people would probably prefer him to go with Roy and it could give them a huge chance to bond a bit more, so I'm literally up for either, as both get me pumped up at opportunities.

Though I *could also* go the route that Riza and Roy start staying together for a while to look after Ed together, and even though it's pushing luck a little and risking putting their positions in jeopardy and could get them in trouble, I'm sure I could work around it.

So really it's up to you guys. I would love to hear your input on this, because I want to write the most logical route without going hospitalization route immediately.

HOWEVER, IF YOU HAVE A DIFFERENT SUGGESTION, PLEASE SHARE, YOU MAY BE SURPRISED AS I MAY JUST USE IT.

Fued

Story: It Is What It Is, Chapter 12.
Disclaimer: I don't own FMA

Happy thanksgiving, Everybody!

I FINALLY got the data off my computer after paying like 350 dollars for a new one and a data transfer, so I got access to the file I needed. I only had a day to come up with some actual content for the dialogue, though, So I hope this isn't too dramatic or rushed, but I swear I tried, yet I couldn't figure out any other way to get to the part that I wanted to, without just explaining what happened before it. ;=;

I hope this chapter is okay, because I truthfully feel like it's probably pretty bad. I just like writing drama-with-a-happy-ending kind of stories, so forgive me.

I'm also questioning whether I should bring Ling in eventually or not, and I'm wondering what to do with the homunculi, if I should do anything? Winry may come in in the next few chapters, or I may hold back on her a bit. Anyway, I hope y'all are enjoying this story and stick with me to the end!

Sur l'histoire ~ (Onto the story)~

...

"Al, there's something I... There's something we need to talk about."

Alphonse had always wanted Edward to open up to him, but, now, Alphonse, could only feel dread. It was somehow ironic, really, but, despite wanting to be there for Edward, he had never felt more apart and insecure. What if it was something that he couldn't help him with after all? Without his body, he had most certainly lost certain aspects of his humanity.

But even so, Alphonse refused to leave his brother's side. Even if there were certain things that he couldn't help with, he could at least listen. It was something that he'd always been good at. Besides, it was difficult to know what actions to take if he didn't know what was wrong.

They were standing in Riza's house. Mustang hadn't felt like going straight back to his office and immediately being bombarded with paperwork again, and, for once, Riza felt there was something more important and urgent to deal with right this minute, so she offered to let them go to her place, since it was closer than Mustang's to the station.

A neighbor had been looking after Black Hayate while Riza was gone, but as soon as Riza stepped in the door, the dog was by her side licking her hand. The neighbor soon left after

Riza thanked her for looking after him. It was quite evident that Black Hayate was happy to see all of them, as he tried to kiss each one of them.

However, when he went over to Edward, the boy couldn't help feel uncomfortable as the dog began to sniff his non-automail arm. Alphonse noticed it, but didn't think too much at first, until Riza scolded the dog. That's when he wondered if there was something wrong with Edward's arm. Dogs had very keen noses, and Black Hayate had been trained for that kind of thing, so it couldn't be nothing. Or maybe he really was just overthinking it?

After Riza had got Black Hayate situated, she had sat down at the table, him by her side, followed by Roy and Edward. Alphonse opted to keep standing.

The table was silent for a while as Mustang and Riza waited for Edward to speak.

"Edward, isn't there something you should be telling Alphonse right now…?" Riza urged in a soft voice, but she wasn't being condescending.

"I…" Edward trailed off into silence, feeling nervous, and sick to his stomach. He could feel Mustang's eyes on him, expecting him to speak. "Can you promise me something, Al…?"

"What is it?" Alphonse asked in concern.

Edward felt like the words were caught in his throat. He let his bangs shadow his eyes. "Promise you won't hate me…"

Alphonse was immediately taken aback by Edward's request. Edward and him may have occasional disputes, but they always worked things out in the end. So why would Edward say something like that? A small part of him couldn't even help but wonder if this had something to do with his missing body, but he pushed that thought aside.

"What are you talking about? Even if we may disagree on things sometimes, I could never hate you, brother." He said.

At hearing that, Edward felt a pang of guilt.

I've been cutting.

Three simple words and he couldn't say them. Because, together, they would hurt Alphonse, and Edward didn't want that. And on top of that, it would spark up conversation with his brother that Edward wanted to avoid more than anything, but he knew he needed to tell Alphonse, so it would be off his chest and Roy and Riza would be satisfied.

That's when he decided to show Alphonse instead of telling him. It would be much easier anyway, since he'd never been good with words.

So, slowly, he pulled back his sleeve and despite his hesitance, he continued and began unraveling some of the bandages, flinching a bit at the pain. When a fair amount of the cuts were revealed, Alphonse was in disbelief. There were so many of them and they were so deep!

All those times that Edward had said his arm was twisted… *this* was the truth? He had been lying?

"What… are those?" Alphonse asked, yet a huge part of him didn't want to hear the answer. "Who did that to you?"

Edward felt his blood go cold, as he looked away with guilt. So despite everything, Alphonse really was just a child. He had never thought of the concept of self-harm, before. "I..."

"He's been cutting..." Roy answered simply, knowing that Edward wouldn't be able to bring himself to speak after that, or at least not answer Alphonse's question. But it wasn't like Edward hadn't done enough. Roy actually found respect for Edward for having to the courage to be able to bring himself to show his cuts.

"Cutting...?" Alphonse repeated, before it finally dawned on him what they were trying to say, and what he had missed in his observation of his brother for so long. "You mean... he *did* that to *himself*?"

Mustang's and Riza's grim expressions confirmed it. Edward sunk even further in on himself.

"Brother, why didn't you tell me anything...?" Alphonse's voice was weaker than ever, but carried the tone of somebody who felt betrayed.

"Because I couldn't... I was afraid that you would be mad at me..." Edward muttered, even weaker than Alphonse's voice.

"Well, you're damn right I'm mad...!" Alphonse said, a little harsher than intended, catching their attention. Edward's eyes widened with pain. Of course, it wasn't like he *hadn't* expected it, though. "But I'm not mad over the fact you've been hurting yourself, I'm mad because you *lied* to me about this, Ed. We're brothers, aren't we? We're supposed to be there for each other! So why didn't you come talk to me for once in your stupid life, instead of simply telling me that you had twisted your arm?"

In truth, Alphonse was less mad, and more frustrated than anything else over having been unable to do anything to prevent things from getting this far. Furthermore, he was scared. Terrified, in fact, of the possibility of finding Edward dead in a pile of his own blood one day. "So is this... *my* fault...?"

"Of course not, Al...!" Edward insisted. "None of this is your fault...! I just..." He turned his head away to avoid facing any of them. "don't know how to deal with things sometimes... It... helps me…"

"How does tearing your skin to pieces help? You could have died! Or is that what you actually want? To die and leave me on my own? Because that's something I won't allow! We *promised* we'd get each other our bodies back and stick by each other's side!" Alphonse wasn't usually the most expressive person, but for some reason, he found that he couldn't just drop it. All of the stress that had been piling up over the last few weeks and even months was finally reaching its peak.

Edward felt a worse pang of guilt than before. Alphonse had no clue that Edward actually *had* almost died. "I'm sorry..."

At hearing Edward's low apology, Alphonse grew silent for a moment, feeling guilty suddenly for snapping at his brother like that, before speaking in a less harsh voice than before. "No, I should be the one apologizing..."

This confused Edward, as he looked up at him with painfilled eyes. "But *why*? *I'm* the one who's been hurting myself. You have every right to be upset…"

"Even so, I should have noticed something, before it got this bad... I've known you long enough that I should have been able to prevent it. Yet I never saw how bad you were suffering..." Alphonse looked down, feeling incredibly conflicted. All this time, he had had suspicion that something else was wrong, but he had wanted to trust his Brother's words, yet he had been naïve, and failed to see through his act.

Edward smiled sadly. "You're so kind to people, Al. You always try to keep things cordial even when I'm nothing but I huge jerk. You've always been that way, ever since we were kids. But you're my little brother. I can't just come running to you every time I'm upset about something or every time I get a cut or bruise. Besides, I was the one hiding it from you, you can't blame yourself for *that*."

"You're wrong, Ed..." Alphonse mumbled. "It doesn't matter which one of us is older. All that matters is that we support each other. I want to be there for you...!"

Edward was silent for a moment as if he was considering his words, before he broke his gaze away from Alphonse, turning his head away.

"...This isn't your burden to bear, Al..." he uttered in a low voice, not able to bring himself to admit reliance on his brother.

Something snapped in Alphonse's mind at this point. Edward was always rushing off and doing reckless things, while trying to bear everything on his shoulders, but this was by far one of the worst decisions he'd ever made. As if he'd allow him to continue down this harmful and reckless path.

"Well, why *shouldn't* it be? After everything we've been through together, doesn't it mean anything to you? Don't you *trust* me?!"

"Of course I do!" Edward insisted. "I just..."

"You just *what*? Because from what I can tell, you *don't*!" Alphonse snapped.

Black Hayate had began to wine a bit, nuzzling Riza's leg, as he sensed the hostility in the room. It was at this moment that Riza stood up. "That's enough, both of you. I think it would best if you two separated for a bit."

Roy and Riza both understood that Alphonse had needed to get this off of his chest, and that Edward needed to hear that Alphonse was worried about him, not mad at him. However, it

was also apparent that Edward and Alphonse both did need some time apart after this, or they would only make things worse. Because she could see error from both of their parts and that things would only get more stressful if she allowed it to continue.

"I need some time alone. I'll be back later." Alphonse simply murmured, turning to leave.

"Wait, Al...!" Edward tried to get up, but Roy reached out, grabbing his hand to stop him.

They exchanged glances, and Roy gave him a look that told Edward to sit back down, and surprisingly he didn't protest.

Alphonse glanced back at him one last time, conflicted, but knew if he stayed, he might say or do something he'd regret. So he simply left the house.

"Edward, are you alright?" Riza asked softly, kneeling down slightly beside him.

"Yeah, I'm fine." Edward mumbled, not turning to look at her. The pain in his eyes and voice was obvious.

Riza gave a pained smile. "You don't have to lie, you know…"

Edward, however, didn't respond, obviously still focused on the argument he just had with his brother.

"Hey," she said, placing a reassuring hand on his shoulder.

"Hm?" Edward briefly glanced at her this time.

"I'm going to talk to Alphonse a bit. I want you to stay here with Roy, okay?"

"Okay…" Edward didn't particularly like the idea of being with Roy alone for long, but decidedly didn't protest.

"No fighting while I'm gone, you two." Riza said.

"Right, I'm sure I can keep from biting Fullmetal's head off for up to at least half an hour." Roy joked.

Edward smirked a bit, albeit incredibly weakly at hearing that.

Riza smirked a bit herself, before heading out after Alphonse.

- *End of Chapter*

...

A/N: I hope y'all enjoyed that. Ed and Al will make up soon, I promise that Al won't stay 'mad' too long and Ed is just confused, but he'll come around soon enough. Al will definitely be there for Ed when it counts. Anyway, I'd love to hear your feedback, even if

it's something as simple as "Really enjoying this! Please update when you can!". And thanks so much to all of my followers and favorites.

Resolve

Story: It Is What It Is, Chapter 13

I don't own FMA

((I hope this is good... I swear it probably sucks))

"Stupid brother…" Alphonse muttered, walking down the street, before finally sitting on a bench in a nearby park. "*Doesn't he trust me?"*

Throughout all the years Alphonse had been by Edward's side, Edward had only ever let him in so much. There were too many things that he still kept from him, even to this day.

"Edward can be quite stubborn at times, but he values your opinion more than you could ever know, Alphonse."

Alphonse jumped a bit when he heard Riza speak beside him. Her tone had been firm, but not angry. No, Riza was not mad at Alphonse for the way he had reacted. He was just a kid, and he was scared. His older brother, his only blood relative left in his direct life, who had been by his side for years, had been tearing his own skin to pieces. It was his first exposure to self-harm, no doubt. It's not like the boy could have *possibly* known what to do or how to react appropriately.

However, he still needed to know that he couldn't snap at Edward like that again, with him in in such a state of mind(or even at all).

"Ms. Riza, I..." Alphonse tried to say, but trailed off into silence. It wasn't like he didn't feel bad for getting into such an argument with Edward. In fact, he felt terrible. After all, he bore part of the responsibility for this, regardless of what Edward said.

"It's okay." Riza said, knowing what he wanted to say. "Everybody makes mistakes once in a while, even Roy and I, otherwise we wouldn't be able to grow as humans, right?" Riza said, with a small smile.

"Mn…" Alphonse uttered in uncertainty.

"Do you mind if I sit down beside you?" Riza asked after a minute.

"Oh, sure…" Alphonse scooted over a bit, so Riza could sit next to him. "So um… Do you by chance know how long he's been doing that to himself?"

"We can't be for sure, but we suspect it's been going on for at least several months." Riza gave the rough estimate that the doctors had given.

"Several *months*?" Alphonse exclaimed incredulously, before thinking about it for a second. Immediately, guilt consumed him. He'd suspected it it had been about that long, judging by Edward's scars, but to hear Riza confirm his suspicion gave it a whole new weight. "How did you… find out about it...?"

Riza hesitated for a moment on whether or not she should let him know what had happened, but after a moment, she scolded herself. Alphonse was his brother. He *deserved* to know.

So she told him.

"The other day… We found him nearly passed out in the bathroom of the house we were staying in. His arms were covered in cuts, and he… was in a pile of blood. We had to call an ambulance immediately and get him to the hospital."

"You mean… Ed almost died?!" Alphonse couldn't believe it. His frustration towards Edward for keeping everything from him only grew at this point, his self-blame along with it.

"In hindsight, yes." Riza admitted grimly. Immediately Alphonse's heart sunk at her confirmation.

"I can't believe I didn't notice anything. This is all my fault." Alphonse cursed himself.

"No, it's not." Riza tried to assure him.

"Yes it is!" Alphonse snapped at her, not realizing just how much like Edward he was sounding. "I'm his brother, I should have been there for him! I should have *known* that this was going on...!"

"You couldn't have *possibly* known...! Even Roy and I… We didn't know anything until it was too late..." Riza said, trying her best to keep herself calm, but it was suddenly obvious that she was just as frustrated as Alphonse over all this, if not more. "I understand that you're frustrated, and you feel responsible, but right now, we need to focus on what's best for your brother, not anything else."

At this, Alphonse lost all will to argue back, because he knew she was right.

"He's been afraid, you know…" Riza thought back over the past week, and especially into the past few days, a pained look in her eyes. "of how you would react when you found out. He worried about it constantly while he was in the hospital. Heck, he even begged Roy not to tell you, all because he was certain you were going to be mad at him. I know you were only worried, and didn't know any better, but Edward…"

Riza looked over at him, meeting his gaze, and not hesitating to be honest. "He took your reaction very much to heart, Alphonse."

Alphonse then realized his mistake. All that time, Edward had kept this from Alphonse because he was afraid of his reaction. Yet, even though Alphonse had simply been worried, he'd reacted in the exact same manner that Edward was afraid of him reacting in. As such, Alphonse had proved Edward's reluctance to not be unfounded, yet he had expected his

brother to open up to him despite all that? Of course he wouldn't trust him when he was acting like that!

However, Alphonse scolded himself, deciding that he couldn't be focusing on what he had done wrong. He had to think about had what needed to be done now in the present to get Edward to stop wanting to hurt himself. That should have been his number one priority from the beginning, not the other trivial things like how long it had been going on, or why he hadn't told anybody.

With that resolve in mind, he uttered out one last thing, before getting up and heading back:

"Ms. Riza... Thank you. I finally realize what I have to do."

End of chapter.

A/N: I hope this came out decent(though it probably sucks since I hardly had much time to work on it), and I'm sorry it's so short. School has been a bitch and same with working at Walmart… I hardly have any time to myself anymore (I even have to get a root canal on Tuesday, which is gonna suck.) (I'll try to have a special scene with Roy and Ed next chapter, but if I don't, there will still be plenty soon enough. And if ya'll have any ideas or suggestions for possible future events feel free to share them with me.)

Happy holidays, everybody!

Panic Attack

I admittedly had help from Quella'Gorgamin on fictionpress with Roy's part in this.

Story: It Is What It Is, Chapter 14.

Disclaimer: I don't own FMA.

Note: Well, I DID promise a moment between Roy and Edward… I admittedly had some help with writing this from somebody else, though, so I hope it came out fine. And please note that NONE of this is meant as RoyEd, only Parental, so if you get different vibes, that's on you.

I've slightly changed my writing style, thanks to roleplaying a bit. (Let me know if you guys want me to go back to the other one)

A suffocating silence has filled the house, and neither party has said anything for a long time.

Edward doesn't know what to think. While it doesn't happen often, getting into arguments with Alphonse is never any less stressful. He feels sick to his stomach and his chest feels tight. He habitually begins to rub his fingers over his arm, thinking back over his conversation with his brother.

"*After everything we've been through together, doesn't it mean* anything *to you? Don't you trust me?!"* Alphonse's words continuously echoes in his head. Of course he trusts Alphonse, he tells himself. Why *wouldn't* he? Alphonse is his *brother*, the only family he truly has left, has been by his side every step of their journey, through thick and thin. It's only natural that he should be able to confide in him *if* he feels the need to.

But he doesn't care to cry over somebody else's shoulder about everything that causes him pain. He doesn't have the *time* to be focusing on trivial things like that *or* his feelings. What's wrong with thinking that way?

Edward knows that he doesn't even have the *right* to focus on his own struggles, considering what he's put Alphonse through. In comparison to *his* suffering, his own is nothing.

Regardless of Roy's or Riza's words to him in the hospital, a huge part of him still feels like this is his business alone, and that Alphonse doesn't need to get involved, nor anybody else.

A huge part of him still clings to the idea that cutting is the way to deal with everything. A huge part of him doesn't *want* to stop, and his argument with Alphonse only reiterates why.

Because none of them could truly understand. If they *did*, they wouldn't be trying to get him to stop.

Yet that doesn't stop the smaller part of him from crying out and telling him it isn't true. It doesn't stop the guilt from welling up inside of him and weighing on his chest, after Alphonse and Riza had left the house. Nor does it stop him from cursing himself for the way he'd shot down Alphonse's concerns as if they weren't valid, and had, in essence, told him to shove off. And it certainly doesn't prevent his breathing from picking up and his heart beat from becoming more erratic by the second after he finally has time to process what had just happened; that he'd just got into a huge argument with his brother, who had meant no harm and only earnestly wanted to help him.

"Fullmetal?" Roy's voice is strained, as he looks over at Edward.

The boy doesn't respond, his normally alert eyes glazed and distant as his automail hand digs into his injured arm, tearing up the bandages around his arm. The freshly scabbed over cuts begin to reopen, blood welling out to stain the white cloth. The liquid trickls down his arm, coating his metal digits.

Shit. Immediately, Roy rushes over to Edward's side. "Ed."

Edward continues scratching at his arm, however, his breaths coming in quick gasps.

Shit. Roy mentally curses. He should've gone with Alphonse. Riza would have been much better qualified to deal with this than him. Roy's heart races, trying to figure out what to do. "Major Edward Elric, let go of your arm right now."

Of course that doesn't work: Edward isn't even responding to his own name. *Shit.*

Roy wraps an arm around Edward's body and forcibly pries the automail away from Edward's abused arm to keep the boy from injuring himself further. "Calm down, Ed."

"Let me go…!" Edward struggles frantically against him. His automail leg connects with Roy's shin and the man flinches.

"No." His arm tightens around Edward, pulling him closer. "Listen to me, Ed. You're going to be fine. You need to relax."

"I need… more…!" Edward cries, still desperately trying to scratch his arm.

"No, you don't. You can fight against it. You're strong." Roy tells him. Edward's automail leg struck him again and he hisses in pain. "I know you are. You fall down, and you always pick yourself back up again. You lost an arm and a leg, so you became a State Alchemist to get your and your brother's bodies back."

Edward is panting, shaking his head and still, still trying to claw at his bloodied arm.

"Ed, stop it!" Roy's eyes narrow painfully.

Am I suffocating him...? The man relaxes his grip around Edward's torso slightly, but the hand keeping Edward's metal hand from gouging himself remains tense. "Listen to me. I need you to try to breathe slower. Can you count with me to ten between each breath?"

"Shit, of course that wouldn't help..." Fuck. Roy mentally kicks himself after a second. But what else can he do except talk and physically restrain him? "Just focus on my voice, okay?"

Edward gives a small nod, finally beginning to register Roy's words and taking slower breaths.

"Good. That's great. You're doing great, Ed." Roy gives a small sigh of relief, bowing his head over Edward's hair and holding him close. *I'm not going to let you die. I swore on the lives I ended in Ishval that I wouldn't let anyone in my power die.* "Just keep breathing. You're going to be okay. Everything is going to be okay."

The last part Roy says more for himself than for Edward.

For a while, Edward is still tense, but gradually begins to relax, his golden eyes regaining some of their sharp intelligence, as he soaks in the warmth of the embrace and the gentle yet firm hand resting on the back of his head that vaguely reminds him of his mother.

Yet even after Edward's breathing has largely returned to normal, Roy still can't quite get himself to let go, an irrational fear that Edward will panic again the moment he released his arms, so the man stays where he is.

"Colonel… You can, um,... let go now..." Edward eventually can't deny the small flush forming on his face, purely at how awkward he felt about being so close to the other man now that he is no longer panicking. If it had been Riza, Edward might have not have felt as awkward, but this is Roy, whom he's expressed animosity towards on numerous occasions.

"Oh, right..." Warmth enters Roy's own face in response and he lets go, averting his gaze, and he mentally curses himself.

Riza really should *have been the one to stay with Edward. She would have known what to do. God, I can't believe I tried to order him to stop. What was I even* thinking*?*

"Sorry…" Roy stares at the table, the blood smeared on Edward's arms and covering Roy's hands silently blaming him. For not taking action quickly enough. For fumbling around and saying the wrong things. For panicking and letting Edward get so badthat his blood now covers them. He barely has a grasp on how he'd managed to stop, Riza and Hughes had been been there every step of the way. He was NOT qualified to deal with this at all. If Riza had been around-

"What are you apologizing for?" Edward gives a sheepish smile as he glances up at Roy before turning to look towards the wall again. He scratches his cheek a bit, leaving behind a smear of red. "I was the one who started freaking out. It's not like you could have really known what to do."

"Even so, I-" Roy shuts his mouth when the door opens and Riza and Alphonse steps in.

A/N: Cliffhanger!...? Sorry, I've barely had any time to write. It's actually nearly 5 AM and I'm supposed to be at work at 9, so I thought I'd post what I had? Ugh...

No More Apologies

Story: It Is What It Is, Chapter 15

Disclaimer: I don't own FMA.

(I realized too late that I forgot Black Hayate for over a chapter, so I will just pretend that he was with Riza when she went to talk with Alphonse, to make things so much more simpler, though I may go back and edit him in to elsewhere eventually.)

(Also changed my writing style back to normal for this chapter. The last chapter (which I have edited some) was kind of an exception because part of it was written in the present tense RP style). This chapter I did have a little help with, but I kept it in past tense.

This was one of the most tedious things I have ever wrote. Everybody was stressed, so I had a very hard time with this. And this chapter in specific is based off of a very personal experience, so try to forgive me.

(Also, I want to know that I do read your reviews, even if I don't reply, and I'd like to thank every single one of you for your support.

Upon hearing the door open, Roy already knew that neither Riza nor Alphonse would be happy about the sight that greeted them when they entered. And it wasn't like there was any time to clean up the blood to make things look less bad than they did.

Naturally, a sense of panic entered Riza as soon as she saw the blood that was covering Roy and Edward, who looked down after seeing both her and Alphonse enter. Without a moment of hesitation, her first instinct was to immediately rush over to Edward, Black Hayate following by her side. She would chew Roy out later. Edward had pulled the sleeve back down over his injured arm. The boy's shoulders slumped and he bowed his head guiltily, knowing exactly what she had approached him over.

"Edward... Can I see your arm…?" she spoke softly, as she kneeled in front of him. She tried her best to keep her voice under control and calm to show she meant no harm.

The boy didn't respond, certain that all of them were disappointed in him. He felt sick, he couldn't speak.

Even as Riza took his guilty silence as a go-ahead, reaching out and taking his hand - even as she gently rolled up the sleeve, he stiffened, preparing to be scolded. He tried not to let out a hiss when the fabric rubbed against his freshly created scratches. His white gloves were abandoned on the floor beside him.

At seeing the damage he'd inflicted upon himself, Riza wanted more than anything to pull the boy into the hug, but she forced herself to keep her composure, knowing that by the look on

his face, Edward didn't want to be coddled right now. She gave him a small pain-filled smile, gently placing her hand on his shoulder.

"...These will get infected if we don't do anything about it. So let's get you cleaned up, okay…?" Riza asked softly.

"...Okay..." Edward got up after a moment. "Sorry…"

"There's no need to apologize, Edward." Riza murmured, as she gently placed a hand on his back. Leading him to the bathroom, she briefly met Roy's gaze. "Like I told your brother earlier, We all make mistakes, even *Roy* and I."

Roy knew in that moment that he was definitely gonna hear Riza's griping later for not having acted sooner. And it wasn't like he could blame her. She was just as scared for Ed's well-being as *he* was, if not more so. She had put her trust in him to look after Edward for a mere *thirty minutes* and he completely *botched* it. *Riza has every right to be angry at me.*

Alphonse wanted to say something, wanted to apologize, wanted to embrace Edward more than anything, wanted to do *something*, but he was practically froze in his spot. He didn't know what to think anymore, didn't trust himself to speak or do anything, and if he had had a body, he would've definitely been sick. *This is all my fault... Dammit, I'm such an idiot…! If I had just kept my big mouth shut, he wouldn't have…*

"Al, can you clean up the table?" Riza interrupted his thoughts, gesturing towards the blood that had been smeared on the table's surface.

"O-oh. Right." Alphonse said, rushing to get a rag from the sink. *No, I can't be thinking about this…! Brother's well-being is all that matters right now!*

Riza thanked him before heading to the bathroom. She gestured for Edward to sit on the side of the bathtub as she took some bandage wraps out of the storage cabinet above the faucet. The woman then turned on the water, and took a moment to adjust and check the temperature. "Ed, hold your arm underneath the faucet."

Edward immediately stiffened a bit in response. The nurses had had him do that at the hospital too, and it had been a huge hassle. Even though the water didn't sting that bad, it wasn't completely painless, and there had even been an issue with one of the wounds reopening and taking forever to stop bleeding, as a result staining several bed sheets. He looked away.

"I know you don't want to, Ed. But I assure you it won't take as long as it did at the hospital. Deal?"

Edward glanced back over at her suspiciously, before sheepishly mumbling beneath his breath. "...You promise…?"

"I promise…" Riza smiled softly. *Edward really is just a child...*

Edward, in response, decidedly held his arm up, the sleeve pulled back to expose the marred skin, and old bandage wrap as asked, although he was clearly reluctant.

Riza then lightly pulled Edward's arm underneath the water, and slowly began working away with the bandage wrap to get it off.

Edward winced slightly, as the still-dry parts of the cloth snagged at his cuts, receiving a low apology from Riza. Once the old bandage wrap was detached from his arm, she threw it away and began to use a rag from the shelf to dab at the blood and wounds underneath the water.

Finally, after getting it to a point that the blood wasn't covering his arm anymore, Riza used another rag to dry it. She then grabbed a tube of antibacterial ointment and unscrewed the lid.

"...This will probably sting a little…" Riza have a small warning. "So try to bear with me, alright…?"

"Alright." Edward barely nodded, allowing Riza to continue.

Edward hissed in pain after the medicated cream had a chance to sit for a few seconds. *It burns! There must be lidocaine in it or something.*

It was ironic, really. He had went through an automail surgery when he was younger, had his nerves connected and reconnected to his prosthetic limbs multiple times, got into fights regularly and even cut himself on practically a daily basis, but this crap still bothered him.

However, instead of commenting further, he waited a bit, before looking down as Riza began to apply new bandage wraps. It was at that moment that he decided to speak up again, but about a different topic. "...Hey, Lieutenant…?"

"What is it, Edward?" she asked.

"You're not mad...at the Colonel, are you?" Edward mumbled, his voice sounding pained. He genuinely felt bad for putting Roy into such a position and hoped that Riza wouldn't blame Roy for that.

He didn't fail to notice the brief moment she seemed to pause.

In reality, Riza was very upset at Roy - at herself for leaving Edward with him, because she *had thought* that he could handle things for at *least* half an hour. Hell, Roy even claimed he would be fine. But yet, she came back and Edward was covered in new cuts and more blood. She should have known that, with Roy's own history, it wasn't a good idea to leave him alone with him until they worked out some kind of plan and had time to talk to Edward about what methods could help him. Then again, Roy probably wouldn't have handled Alphonse any better either…

However, despite her frustration, she held back from stating her honest thoughts, knowing that it would only make Edward feel worse than he probably already did. "...No, Edward, I'm not angry."

And in truth, it wasn't even entirely a lie.

Was she angry? No.

Disappointed, *yes*.

"It wasn't his fault…" Edward mumbled after a while, petting Black Hayate, who'd followed them into the bathroom. "He tried to do the best he could, but it just wasn't enough… I'm sorry I caused so much trouble."

Riza felt a pain in her chest at hearing him say that. *Why does he keep saying sorry…?*

"No more apologizing, Ed." Riza lightly bumped him on the head, now that she had finished and thrown away the old bandages. "Now, Come on. Let's go back to-"

Riza was cut off by a loud thump coming from the other room.

Immediately, Edward got up and left the bathroom, followed by Riza.

When they were heading into the kitchen, however, they stopped dead in their tracks as a very unpleasant sight and sound greeted them.

Alphonse was holding Roy by his collar against the wall, and Roy had his ignition glove poised to snap at any given moment.

"I beg your pardon?" Roy rose an eyebrow. "Care to explain just exactly how this is *my* fault?"

Riza opened her mouth to speak, but was cut off by Alphonse:

"Before you left on that trip, you told me to not worry... So I wanted to believe he would be okay. But while he was off with you, Brother almost *died*! And this time... you didn't stop him from hurting himself *this* time either…!"

Edward felt sick at hearing this. Alphonse knew about it. But *how*? Had Riza told him?

Black Hayate began whining again, and Riza started to approach them. "Both of you, separate. *Now*."

However, Mustang hardly spared her a glance, and willingly ignored her if only to set Alphonse straight on one thing, much to Riza's irritation.

"And may I remind you that you were the one who upset him in the first place, Alphonse? Or maybe you also need a reminder that you've been by his side for years and didn't notice anything." Roy pointed out.

"Maybe that's true, maybe I *did* screw up, but, even so, *you're* his *commanding officer*, the one in charge of-!"

"Stop fighting, dammit...!"

A voice cut them off, but it wasn't Riza this time, although she *herself* had been about to speak again or use force to separate them if necessary. It was Edward. He was clenching his fists.

Both Roy and Alphonse immediately fell into silence when seeing the hurt expression on Edward's face.

"Mustang isn't to blame, Al, *none* of you are." Edward choked out.

"But, Brother, he-" Riza held a hand up to his armor, cutting him off.

Edward didn't say anything, only glaring at the floor.

"I need to go and calm down..." Alphonse, who surprisingly let go of Roy's shirt at this point, suddenly felt worse than ever, before he walked off into another room right after. After all, Edward probably wanted some space after everything, and he knew he would only make things worse if he tried to speak anymore at this point. It would be best to wait until the atmosphere was a little less tense.

Edward was left with his shoulders trembling due to pent up frustration and anxiety, as Riza began approaching him after whispering something to Roy.

"I'm sorry…" he uttered after a moment, barely above a whisper. "This is all my fault..."

"No, its *not*. Don't you *dare* blame yourself." Riza's voice was stern, yet somehow reassuring, as she reached out and gently grabbed his automail hand to separate it from his arm. He hadn't even entirely realized he'd started rubbing it. "It's not your fault that they couldn't handle themselves more maturely."

Roy hadn't moved from his spot either, but had turned away to avoid Riza's glance.

"Still, if it weren't for *me*, they wouldn't have been arguing in the first place…!" Edward retorted, raising his voice.

I always wanted to believe that cutting myself would only affect me alone, but it's starting to impact everybody around me and not in a good way. If this is what it results in, then I have to find a way to stop, because I can't stand to see them fighting anymore... I just want everyone to get along.

"Edward..." Without hesitation, Riza softly pulled the boy into an embrace. "...It may be true that everybody is worried about you, but you had no control over their reaction. You can't keep beating yourself up over everything."

Edward stiffened immediately, but quickly felt himself giving in to her embrace, reminded far too much of Trisha. Tears welled up in his eyes, but he blinked them away, and found himself apologizing *yet again that day*. "I'm sorry..."

"It's okay, because we're going to work through this. We just have to find something else that helps you." Riza couldn't help but smile a bit with fondness for the boy. "...And I thought I told you to stop apologizing, Ed..."

"...Can't help it." Edward muttered, looking away.

...

Edward soon followed after Alphonse, who was in the guest bedroom.

For a minute or two, nothing was said, even as Edward went to lay down on one of the beds. However, after Edward began adjusting the pillow he was laying on, Alphonse uttered something in a choked voice.

"Brother…"

"What is it…?"

"...I'm so sorry for yelling at you earlier, for acting the way I have today. I'm just so scared. I don't want to lose you..." It was obvious in the way that Alphonse trailed off that he would have been crying if he had a human body. "I'm sorry. I just wish I had known. I wish I had known before it got this bad."

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Alphonse kept saying sorry repeatedly, sending another pang of guilt to weigh on Edward's chest. The older brother had got back up and walked over to Alphonse's side, sitting beside him against the wall. Reaching up, he reassuringly placed his skin hand on top Alphonse's helmet.

"Hey, come on, Al, no more apologizing, okay?" He offered a small pain-filled smile, hating to his brother cry.

"It's not your fault... You were just worried about me, you have every right to be." He said before looking away. "And you were right… We need to work through this together, as a family…"

…

"So mind explaining exactly what happened in there while I was gone today, Roy?" Riza had her arms folded and she was standing by the closed door of her bedroom. Last she checked, Edward was asleep by Alphonse's side, so he shouldn't be an immediate threat to himself. After things had calmed down, Riza finally decided to pose the long due question that was nagging in her mind.

Black Hayate was lying close by, curled into a ball and sleeping on the floor.

Roy easily figured that she wasn't referring to his confrontation with Alphonse. "...Edward had a panic attack and he started scratching his arm…"

"So where were you when he started panicking? Judging by the state of the wounds, it didn't look like you took immediate action, sir."

"I didn't." Roy looked away guiltily. "At first, it was because I didn't see what he was doing with his hands beneath the table, but when I realized it… I acted like an idiot and ordered him to stop because my mind went blank."

"...You *ordered* him to stop *cutting* himself?" Riza asked incredulously. She couldn't believe it.

Roy rubbed a hand over his face. "I panicked, okay...?!"

"I *trusted* you to look after him, Roy…!" Riza retorted, accusingly.

"I know, I'm *sorry…!*" Roy looked away.

Riza sighed. She decided to not fuss anymore, seeing as Edward had so adamantly defended him, and because Roy genuinely seemed sorry, but that didn't mean she could just turn her head to allow it to happen again."...For now, I think Ed should just stay with me, at least until we help him find some better coping mechanisms and have time to discuss a plan in case the same thing happens again, because it probably will."

Roy sighed, knowing she was right and would be better equipped to dealing with Edward than he would anyway. On top of that, being Edward's commanding officer had its drawbacks. There would be a lot less questions from the military and less risk if the boy was staying with Riza rather than himself.

He then offered his opinion awkwardly, a pain-filled look in his eyes: "That's probably for the best..."

...

A/N: I hope this turned out okay. It was VERY hard to write. I FINALLY HAD SOME TIME THANKS TO CHRISTMAS BREAK TO WRITE SO I WROTE. WOOT

Also, Riza will not stay frustrated with Roy too long… I swear

Looking For Answers

Story: It Is What It Is, Chapter 16
Disclaimer: I don't own FMA.

FINALLY BACK, but I'm under an extreme rush right now.

I've been in the hospital for the past two weeks, but I FINALLY got out and finished my rewatch of Brotherhood and reread some of the manga, and I decided to add Ling in. Gonna wait on Winry (But I have a VERY special plan for her, so just wait.) I also found a new direction I'm going with my life and I feel great for once, but I'm super tired. :D

I'm planning to become a psychology teacher for high school students eventually.

Anyway,

Originally, I wanted to drag the antagonism between Roy and Riza on longer and have Ed get involved.

Originally, I wanted to have Roy tell Ed something like, **"Riza may be mad at me now, and she has every right to be, but she'll get over it eventually. After all, our bond is too strong to be disrupted by something this small, kid, so you have nothing to worry about." And pat him on the head.**

Originally, I wanted something like:

"Lieutenant…?"

"What is it, Ed?"

"Why are you still so upset at the Colonel? I know he didn't respond in the best way the other day, but please don't be mad at him over it…"

Riza relents and decides to ask Roy how he would handle the situation in the situation that Ed panics again.

but I couldn't bring myself to do so because I needed to get to other plot points and just skipped to the last part about Riza asking Roy the question. (Sorry, guys) I just decided to have Roy and Riza sort out their own problems sort of, but this chapter is honestly probably shit... (If y'all don't like I can just go back and change it, I guess)

(THIS WHOLE CHAPTER AND ESPECIALLY THE END IS REALLY CRINGY IN MY OPINION. NEXT CHAPTER WILL BE BETTER I SWEAR, so please PLEASE try to bear with me. T_T And no, most coping mechanisms don't help me, but there are

a few who do, like writing, drawing, throwing stress balls. HOWEVER, Edward and I am not the same person, so I want to know what coping mechanisms Edward should use. (I've already gathered that maybe he likes people to mess with his hair, because the touch is relaxing.)

Some of you all have been wondering what point this takes place at. Basically it takes place shortly after Ling meets Ed in Rush Valley, but before Ling gets taken over by Greed. Presumably, Ed is still 15 in this and close to 16 as Winry said in the manga when they're on the train). Basically after Lust is dead though.

Moonlight spilled in through the windows, dimly illuminating the guest bedroom. Alphonse was still sitting against the wall, Edward resting the back of his head on his brother's armor leg.

I'm still finding it so hard to process everything, and I can't imagine how long he's been going through this.

Alphonse felt himself becoming hyper aware of the bandages on Edward's arm and the painful memory of seeing the fresh blood and cuts earlier that day.

How did I not notice anything until now? I've been with him for years…

I know that Ms. Riza told me not to focus on this, on the past, but it's very hard not to. I just feel so bad since he's been suffering through this alone all this time.

Alphonse slowly got up brought Edward to the bed. Under normal circumstances, Edward might have woke up, but he was apparently too tired to. It must've been a while since he had got a full night's rest.

I have to focus on helping Ed. Yet, without a body, I can't even begin to imagine how cutting oneself could make somebody feel better. What if I'm not even qualified to deal with Brother? What if I just make things worse for him…? No, I'm sure there's something even I *can do. I just have to find out what it is. The first step to that is researching into this stuff.*

Ah, that's it! Tomorrow, I'll go to the library and read as much as I can.

...

Riza didn't get any sleep that night at all(nor even the past couple of nights in the hospital for that matter), afraid that if she turned her back even for a few moments, Edward would do something to hurt himself or something bad would happen to him.

She was tired and on edge, the memory of finding Edward nearly dead in a pile of his own blood all too vivid in her head.

Yet, during and since Ishval, she regularly had went through insomniac periods of restlessness, so this was nothing new. She couldn't be worried over something so trivial.

Roy had long since left, claiming he was gonna go and try to get started on his paperwork at the office.

Riza had finally choked back some of her pride and asked him the question she should have earlier: "Roy, if Ed was alone with you in the future and he started to panic again, what would you do...? I need to know, before I can ever trust you with him again."

"The answer to that should be obvious." Roy had said. "Unlike before, I'd try to talk him out of it before it got that far."

Riza was more satisfied with his answer at that point and decided that, although Edward and Alphonse should still primarily stay with her to avoid too much suspicion from the higher ups, Edward could safely stay around Roy when and if necessary.

However, before leaving, he then told her, "Call me if anything comes up. Oh and, Lieutenant, I know it may be hard, but try to get some rest if you can. Unlike Alphonse, you actually need sleep to function."

A small part of her felt irritation at his suggestion, despite the fact that there was no ill-intention behind his words.

How could he possibly even *think* of suggesting sleep when Edward was going through something like this?

No, logically and in her heart, she knew that she was just frustrated for not having been able to prevent things from getting as far as they did. And if she didn't get any rest, she would be in no shape to look after him.

But a larger part of her wanted to deny it.

Black Hayate, who was by her side, began licking at her hand, snapping out of her thoughts. She looked over and smiled softly, reaching up to pet him. "You wanna go outside, boy?"

Black Hayate's tail wagged in response.

…

Once Black Hayate has done his business outside, Riza came back in and went into the guest bedroom where Edward and Alphonse were.

Alphonse had moved Edward to the bed and was sitting in a chair next to it. Edward's sleeping face was uncharacteristically gentle and reserved.

"It's almost funny how you're like the older one at times, watching over him while he sleeps..." Riza murmured after a moment. "You boys have been through a lot... and I'm sure he's a handful sometimes..."

"No kidding. Brother is the most stubborn idiot I know, and he can be a bit of a jerk sometimes too, but... he's a real softy when you get to know him." Alphonse laughed a little, a hint of sadness in his voice.

"Yes... He is." Riza smirked fondly.

...

"Alphonse? Do you need something?" Riza asked, looking over to see Alphonse in the kitchen.

"Um… Ms. Riza, I'm going to the library to do some research, so I can get a better understanding on how to help Brother. Also, I've heard that Alkehestry can be used for advanced healing properties, so I'm going to see if I can find any helpful books on that too." Alphonse told her. He was originally just reading Alkehestry books to see if it could be used to get his body back, but the fact that Edward had been cutting himself added a whole new urgency to this situation. He could potentially use it to heal Edward's wounds and save his life in case something like that happened again. "If Brother asks about me, can you just tell him that I'm at the library and that I'll be back later?"

"Of course, that's fine. Take your time…" Riza smiled a bit.

"Will you be able to handle him alone?" Alphonse asked in uncertainty.

"Yes, he'll be fine with me." Riza knew she'd have to keep a closer eye on Edward with nobody around, but it wasn't something she couldn't handle. After all, she'd handled *Roy* on a daily basis.

"Also... I wanted to apologize about yesterday..." Alphonse was looking down cast. "I was really stressed and took it out on the Colonel, but I shouldn't have done that because it wasn't his fault."

"Everybody was stressed out, so don't worry about it, okay? The Colonel isn't mad at you, Al." Riza reassured.

"He's not?" Alphonse seemed surprised and doubtful.

"No, he's not. Now go on." Riza smirked.

"Right, thank you. See you later, Ms. Riza!" Alphonse said, before running out the door.

Speaking of Ed, I should probably go and wake him up shortly...

…

Edward was snapped out of his sleep by Black Hayate jumping on his chest, licking his face and neck. The boy started laughing. "Hey, stop that, that tickles! Black Hayate…!"

"Down, boy." Riza's voice brought his attention to her presence. Black Hayate listened and jumped off of the bed.

"Lieutenant...?" Edward looked up at her, confused. "Where's Al…?"

"Alphonse went to the library earlier. He said he'd be back later." Riza told him.

"He did?" Edward undeniably felt a little dejected. "What'd he go to the library for...?"

"He said he was going to do some research on Alkehestry." Riza explained.

"Hm..." Edward uttered in response, deep in thought. What if Alphonse had said that he was going to study Alkehestry just to be nice, when in reality he was just wanting to get away after seeing such things the day before.

He knew it was petty and irrational to get so worked up over such things, but it was, once again, irrational. Nobody liked being rejected or shunned, especially by those closest to them, but for Edward, it was his worst fear.

"Ed? Is something the matter?" Riza's voice snapped him out of his troubling thoughts.

"Huh?" Edward jumped a bit, before shaking his head and giving a strained smile. "Nah, it's nothing."

…

"Wow, you really overdid yourself this time, Lieutenant." Edward smirked after finishing the breakfast that Riza had made. It had been a variety of ham, egg, toast and a couple other things. He looked away. "By the way, where's the Colonel?"

"He left early this morning to get a head start on his work." Riza explained. Of course, she had no clue when or if he actually *made* it to work, given that he hadn't got anymore sleep than she had, but there was no need to elaborate on that.

Edward pondered it. A small part of him felt a little hurt by Roy leaving so soon after what had just happened the day before, but he didn't want to sound selfish or petty, so he kept his thoughts to himself, even when they began to delve into irrational less-than-desirable thoughts.

Riza noticed the look on his face again and decidedly got up. Edward was snapped out of his thoughts when she began to brush his hair that was loosely hanging over his shoulders. *That feels nice.*

He would never admit it out loud, but he actually began to relax at the process, especially as she ran her fingers through his hair to divide it into three different sections.

"Ed, you… You know you can always trust us, right?" Riza asked as she braided his hair.

"'Course." Edward murmured.

Riza sighed, but smiled sadly. *Edward still doesn't know how to let others in even when he's clearly distraught. But I'm sure he will eventually, he just needs time.*

"Ed, I know this may be hard for you, but when or if you ever feel like hurting yourself, please tell me or even Roy, no matter what, okay?"

"...Okay." Edward responded, hesitation obvious in his voice, his stomach turning in guilt.

"I mean it." Riza lightly pinched Edward's cheek. "I never want to see you covered in that much blood again, mister."

Even though she was teasing him, she was no less serious.

"Yeah, sorry..." Edward mumbled.

"Hey, what did I say about-"

"*No more apologizing*. I know, I know, *Mom*..."

...

Alphonse had been at the library for a few hours. He'd always been a fast reader, so finishing 7 books (some of them, of course, not being that long) wasn't that big of a feat.

According to the books, there were several different reasons why people would cut themselves.

- Physical pain takes away emotional pain. The physical pain of cutting not only diffuses negative emotion, but it also creates a sense of calm and relief. Because it works almost instantly, cutting is highly reinforcing—some even say addictive. Individuals who cut describe the sensation as an escape or a release of pressure, similar to how people suffering from bulimia describe purging.

- Cutting can be a way to stop feeling numb. In particular, individuals with a trauma history may self-harm to take control of their own pain, and feel something other than numbness.

- It's an alternative outlet for emotional pain. Kids raised in a household where sadness, hurt, or disappointment get invalidated or mocked start to believe that it's not okay to feel bad. They turn to cutting as an "acceptable" way to feel pain—if they're not allowed to feel it emotionally, they'll let it out physically."

"I just… don't know how to deal with things sometimes... It... helps me…" Edward's voice echoed in his head.

I just wish he would have told me how it helps him.

- First, it's important to match the solution with the reason for cutting. If cutting is a way to feel deep dark emotions, experiment with ways to feel those emotions safely: write out your thoughts in a journal, even if you just write page after page of profanity in big black letters. If cutting is a way to release tension, move your body—visit a boxing gym or go for a long, pounding run."

Brother would never write in a journal and he already gets enough exercise…

- If channeling your pain into another activity doesn't work, simulating cutting might help. It won't be as satisfying, but it's safer. Squeeze ice until your hands hurt or draw on your skin with a red marker instead of cutting it.

Maybe a red marker might help him... Or some kind of rough brush?

Some of the other books have suggested to put elastic bands on one's wrists, arms or legs and flick them, which probably wouldn't help either...

Craftwork: Drawing or painting

As far as I know, brother doesn't care for art, all though he was always talented with making Alchemic sculptures back when we were kids...

Cooking, Cleaning, Dancing... Singing, Crying

Ha, Ed would probably never even be caught dead doing most of that.

Read a book

Reading... Brother likes reading some books. That could be a possibility.

Open up to a friend or family member about how you are feeling

I wish he would...

Pop bubble wrap, Play with a stress ball or make one yourself

Argh! Hardly any of this probably going to work, because Brother is one of the most uncooperative...!

"That's quite the touchy subject you're reading about there, Alphonse. Surely, you couldn't be reading about it for fun."

Alphonse jumped when he was snapped out of his thoughts by a familiar voice. He turned around to see his Xingese friend standing there. "Ling!"

A/N: Ugh cliffhanger... I'm so sorry, I really have so much I plan to work with... It was very hard for me to work with everything... (The last scene was the hardest to add detail to it... Sorry.

Seek and You'll Find

Story: It Is What It Is, Chapter 17
Disclaimer: I don't own FMA.

BAD CHAPTER NAME IS BAD

Also, I had to take Ling's fainting serious for this, but I promise he'll be fine, he just needs to keep snacks with him! This is also my first time ever writing for Ling, so I hope I portrayed him decently.

Sorry this chapter is so short, and it only included Ling and Al, but it's something... I'm having really bad nausea and acid reflux due one of my medicines and my arms and legs are hurting and shaking right now. On top of that, I have a headache, so I hope you all will bear with me.

So a very important person to me who once cut behaves a lot like Ling, so I'm basing him off of personal experience in this. M aybe it's a little extreme having Ling of all people have had the same issues Ed does and Roy did, but he did it for a different reason than Roy or Ed. The societal expectations in Xing are supposed to be incredibly stressful, especially for those of royalty and I will go further into his reasoning at a later point in the actual story. But I feel like Ling is at a point that he could confidently help Ed and speak of what had worked for him in the past.

Don't get me wrong, Roy is still going to be just as helpful and will probably talk at some point with Edward about what he did and what helped him personally too.

Replies to Comments

waddiwasiwitch: I really liked the interaction between Ed and Riza.

That's something I was worried about, so I'm really glad you liked it! :D;;

GunsAndMagic: Ooh, Ling! Interesting addition. Can't wait to see where it goes

I hope the hospital stay was okay. Hugs!

Yeah, I look forward to writing for Ling, this will be my first story with him in it!

And yeah, the hospital stay sucked, but I'm alive and better, so there's that. :D

"That's quite the touchy subject you're reading about there. Surely, you couldn't be reading about it for fun."

Alphonse jumped when he was snapped out of his thoughts by a familiar voice. He turned around to see his Xingese friend standing there. "Ling!"

Ling always had had a knack for popping in out of nowhere, but it was no less startling to Alphonse.

"How long have you been there?! And where are your bodyguards?" Alphonse asked.

"Just a short while. And don't tell anybody, but I kind of ditched them… Don't get me wrong, I like them, but being followed around all the time is kind of exhausting." Ling said after a brief pause, scratching his head.

I almost feel bad for his bodyguards, but, as a prince, Ling probably never has any time to himself... I couldn't even begin to imagine it.

Ling sat down beside him and placed his cheek in his hand. "So, if you don't mind me asking… why were you reading about self-harm?"

Alphonse grew a little tense at the question. *What can I say? I doubt even Ling will buy it if I said I was just curious. But brother would probably kill me if I told him about it...* "Um, well, you see, a friend of mine has been cutting himself, and I'm trying to figure how to help him."

"Perhaps I could provide you with some assistance then." Ling said.

"Well, of course I could use all the assistant I can get, but how do you know about this?" Alphonse was immediately surprised by Ling's offer. *How does he know anything about this? Could he-*

Ling began to undo part of his sarashi to reveal a section of scars on his forearm. Some of them looked like they must have been pretty bad up close, but, since they were faded, they wouldn't have been that noticeable at a distance.

"Ling, you…" Alphonse didn't know what to think. Ling, of all people, who appeared so happy and content all the time, had went through the same rough period Edward was going through?

"I actually used to cut myself a few years back, so I can answer any questions you have." Ling explained, interrupting Alphonse's thoughts, but confirming his suspicions that he wanted to deny.

He sounds so care-free, like he's not bothered by it at all.

"Wait, are you sure…? I don't want to push you to do something you don't want to…" Alphonse mumbled with uncertainty.

"Go right ahead, really, I wouldn't have offered if I didn't mean it. But first… This friend you speak of…" Ling's eyes narrowed ever so slightly. "It's Edward, isn't it?"

Alphonse was shocked. *I really want to deny it, and Brother will probably be mad at me for this, but maybe I can trust him... And Ed needs as much support from friends as he can get*

right now. (Although Brother would probably deny that they're actually friends…)

"...How did you know?" Alphonse asked incredulously.

"Intuition." Ling answered vaguely.

Of course he wouldn't give a straight answer... .

But it should have been *so obvious*, Alphonse suddenly realized. Edward had been visibly depressed for at least a month, it would only make sense that Ling would notice, especially if he'd went through the same thing before.

"So how long ago did you find out…?" Ling asked.

"Just yesterday… Apparently, Brother nearly died due to cutting on the mission he went off on with his commanding officer." Alphonse explained.

"I see..." Ling seemed to muse over it for a second.

"Please, Ling, you have to tell me how to get him to stop. I'm so worried that he's going to kill himself doing this..." Alphonse asked.

"Unfortunately, it's not that simple." Ling said. "I understand your frustration, but unless Ed actually *wants* to, it's going to be very difficult to get him to. Has he verbalized any desire to stop?"

"Yes, I think so. Yesterday, he admitted that we need to work through it, if that counts for anything..." Alphonse said. He knew that Edward wasn't beyond saying what he could to please those around him, but he liked to believe that wasn't his brother's intentions.

"Hmm…" Ling thought about it, as if considering something. "It would be probably be more help if I could actually speak to him myself… But I can wait a bit on that."

"He's off at work, so you wouldn't be able to get up with him until later anyway…" Alphonse said. "So can you... um… tell me why he would be… doing that to himself?"

"Sorry, I can only speak for myself when it comes to this," Ling apologized, "but there are usually four reasons people cut. The first being for escape or detachment, the second being a release, the third being distraction, and the fourth being for connection. Chances are he's either doing it for a release or an escape, since he isn't good at expressing himself."

"That actually makes some sense." Alphonse thought about it. "Brother is terrible at outsourcing and he never talks about his emotions or feelings. But he has people he can trust everywhere. I just don't understand why he-"

"Not quite." Ling interrupted. "Ed may have friends, but that's not always enough... It's possible that he is afraid of letting you and others in for some reason. Aside from a fear of judgement that often comes with these kind of things, has he faced any kind of abandonment or loss in the past that would make it hard to trust others?"

Loss.

Hughes, Nina, Mom.

Abandonment…

…!

That's it. How could I have been so ignorant…?!

"Dad!" Alphonse shouted. *It makes so much sense now. Brother is afraid of letting others in, because he's afraid of them leaving him.*

"Woah…!" Ling edged back a bit, startled.

Alphonse seemed to ignore him however, and continued. "Dad left when we were very young. Brother always hated him for it... And he also blamed him for Mom's death."

"Were they close, before it happened…?" Ling murmured, deep in thought. There was a reflective look in his eyes.

"I suppose. Since we were so young at the time, we don't remember him all that well, but I think what memories I have of him were actually fairly decent. But my brother was apparently so hurt by it that he refuses to even call him dad anymore."

"Wow, that must have been rough for him…" Ling offered, amazed. "Because of how many siblings I have, I've never actually *had* the chance to be close to my own father."

Even though Ling didn't say it, Alphonse knew that that was an automatic price that came along with being a person of nobility, especially being the emperor's son.

"Ling, what happened to your mother?" Alphonse asked.

"I was pulled away from her when I was eight and placed in the dorms. It's the regulation of all males of royalty in Xing." Ling explained.

"I see… Eight? We were pretty young too when we *lost ours*."" Alphonse mused.

"So anyway," Ling changed the conversation, "have you found any coping mechanisms in these books that you could have Ed try?"

"I *did* read about a few coping mechanisms, but I don't know if any of them will work." Alphonse said, uncertainly.

"Mind naming some of them?" Ling inquired.

"It was mainly things like drawing, exercise, reading, using a red marker on your skin, and writing." Alphonse explained.

"Perhaps he could try meditation?" Ling suggested. "Even acupuncture might be able to offer him some relief from his thoughts."

"Unfortunately, I doubt that that would work. Brother isn't the type to sit still for long." Alphonse said.

"Exactly," Ling, however, seemed painfully aware. "That's his problem. He can't ever relax because he's always pushing himself.. Maybe he's afraid that something bad will happen if he doesn't."

Alphonse grew silent at hearing that. *It's true… Ed never relaxes. He's always getting himself into trouble, because of that inability to sit still for even five minutes. Could it be my fault? Brother is always preoccupied with getting my body back that he often fails to look after his own health...*

"Hey, Alphonse, I'd like to see Ed for myself, so is it okay if I drop by later? I'm going to have to... go for now..." Ling suddenly said, as he stood up. *Are his arms shaking? He kind of looks pale.*

"Sure, we can continue this conversation later, then." Alphonse nodded. However, he grew worried when Ling seemed to sway a bit.
"Hey, are you alright?"

"I will be... It's just my… hypoglycemia..." Ling said.

Alphonse didn't know what Ling was talking about, but knew that something wasn't right.
"Ling, maybe you should sit down."

"Hey, is everything okay over here?"

"Sir, are you alright?"

Ling opened his mouth to speak in response to the two voices, but it was at that moment that he fell to the floor, nearly unconscious.

"I need food…" he finally uttered.

How could I forget? Ling faints when he gets hungry...

Alphonse sighed.

- End of Chapter

A/N: I hope you guys liked this okay. I'm so fucking terrible. D'x x'D

A Start

Story: It Is What It Is, Chapter 18
Disclaimer: I don't own FMA.

If anybody hadn't realized, Ed's fear of abandonment is strongly based off of my experience with Borderline Personality Disorder. It has caused me so much pain and grievance in my life, I hope you guys will try to be patient with me.

From what I understand, the FMA characters use 'sir' for both female and male officers, so that's what I'm gonna go with.

...

Ling was okay after everything was said and done. Fortunately, they chose not to call out an ambulance, instead offering Ling some crackers, which Ling said would get him by at least for a little while.

"Oh, wow, it's been a while since I ate, I guess I must have forgot to..." Ling said sheepishly.

"You need to take better care of yourself, Ling." Alphonse scolded. "How do you expect to ever be emperor if you're always fainting, huh? You should start carrying around crackers in those pockets of yours or something."

Ling was silent for a moment at his exasperation. "...Yeah, maybe you're right."

…

Ed has been cutting himself. I can't quite say I'm surprised.

Ling walked down the street, heading back to inevitably meet up with Lan Fan and Fu.

But even so, it's not exactly what I would have expected from him… I don't really know what to think. I told Al what I knew, but chances are there's more to this than either of us are even aware of… I never wanted to see anybody else going down the same path I was back then… Especially not one of my friends.

Ling found himself tracing his hand over his arm, momentarily trapped in the past. *First, I'll just have to talk with him myself later…*

...

"Good morning, Lieutenant."

"Welcome back, sir."

"How was your journey?"

One after another, people greeted Riza.

"Wow, you're pretty popular, Lieutenant." Edward smiled light-heartedly.

"Yes, well, it's one of the many inevitabilities that come with being one of the only female officers in the military."

"You almost make it sound like you don't like it." Edward observed.

Riza looked up ahead as if she was reflecting on something. "I don't. Not really."

Edward was a bit taken aback by her response, but didn't press the question any further.

...

When they reached Roy's office and entered, they were surprised to find that he had finished most of the paperwork on his desk, although a lot of envelopes and various other things sat on his desk and at its side.

"So you were actually serious when you said you were going to do your paperwork." Riza commented.

"Well, if I hadn't, you would have had my head, right?" Roy defended himself with a smirk.

"Well, that *is* part of my job, sir." Riza said simply.

"So, um..." Edward interjected, trying to think about how to ask what they wanted him to do after everything the week before. It was then that Roy spoke, cutting him off.

"Ah, Fullmetal, I have a mission for you and the Lieutenant..."

…

"Kidnappings?" Edward inquired.

"Yes, a string of them, all murders." Roy answered. "Typically, they vanish three or four days before turning up dead. Apparently, the bodies were destroyed from the inside, we assume through the usage of alchemy, or Xingese Alkahestry, one..." Even Edward seemed disturbed, but apparently forced himself to regain his composure.

"Sir, do you think it could it be Scar?" Riza asked.

"No," Roy said. "Aside from the fact that Scar has only been killing state alchemists, the chemical make-up of the bodies left behind is different from what should be in a living human body. In addition to some missing carbon, there is significantly less nitrogen-"

"You think they're transmuting part of the bodies into a bomb to cause the explosion." Edward finishes, grimacing, and Roy nods with a grim smile.

At Riza's slightly quirked eyebrow Roy explains. "Nitroglycerine is a powerful explosive, and the missing elements from the bodies we've found could be indicative of their use to create the chemical. Once the Nitroglycerine has exploded, all of the resulting chemicals such as carbon dioxide and dinitrogen would be blown away as gases. The explosion would cause an identical projection spatter as what is seen with Scar's MO, without matching the chemical MO. My guess is that this is somebody that has only read about Scar through the newspapers and seen a few photographs."

Roy then turned to Edward and Riza. "There's a man I want you to observe for the day. We have a warrant."

"Spying? So... who exactly is this guy...?" Edward asked.

Roy slid a picture in front of Edward, with a man's face on it. (describe the man's face?)

"Griffin Yaeger. He's a military veteran and an ex-State Alchemist, fought in Ishval against the uprisings for four years before leaving. As to why I'm having you two investigating him, there was a mother that was insistent that he is responsible for the kidnappings and murders. Her argument is that her child said he was seen dragging a person into his workshop. But given that these rumors are from a child, I wouldn't pay them too much mind. However, even if this turns out to be a hoax and Griffin is innocent, do not let your guard down, whoever is really behind this is dangerous, got it?"

"Sir." Riza raised her hand to her forehead.

"Right…" Said Ed.

…

Griffin Yaeger.

At a distance, he seemed like a dull, but average, man who was *just living*.

But he was far from average. He was gifted in alchemy, well-versed in many subjects and was considered a genius by those around him who knew him best.

However, his friends found him to be rather quiet, stoic, a little aloof and in his own world a lot. He was constantly at his workshop and often pulled away from other people. Since leaving the military, he had become the very definition of a shut-in.

Kids found him to be scary because they couldn't read him and some adults even found him to be suspicious and a little unsettling.

Yet, he was ironically rather observant of his surroundings, probably something he'd picked up in Ishval. Even now, he knew he was being followed.

"You can come out, I already know you're following me." He said, his voice drained of emotion. They'd been following him around the past five or six hours, even *he* had his limitations.

"Well, isn't that a relief. Standing back and spying on people has never been my strong suit, anyway." Edward said, stepping out from behind the wall, receiving a small "Edward…!" from Riza, who decided to follow after him.

Griffin didn't pay much attention to Edward, but when Riza stepped out, Griffin looked surprised. "Hold on… Hawkeye? Riza Hawkeye? Oh, great, don't tell me that you've come to try to get me to come back."

"No, sir, it's nothing like that. We just have a few questions to ask you, if that's okay? However, we do have a warrant to search your wearhouse." Riza told him.

Griffin sighed. "This has to do with the kidnappings, doesn't it? I guess it can't be helped... Come on…"

…

His warehouse was normal on the overall, noted by Riza and Edward. However, in one area of the building, there were some clay dolls that almost looked life-like.

There were transmutation circles all around.

"Well, that probably explains the reason why the kids were claiming that he had bodies..." Riza mused. "Any particular reason you make these dolls?"

"Well, it's a means of escape, I suppose. After the things I saw and did in Ishval, I've considered just letting myself go, but I keep telling myself that I have to live with what I've done… So this is my way of doing that..."

"Coping through art, huh...?" Riza thought about it. "Maybe you should try craftwork sometime, Ed. *You're* talented."

"No way, I suck at art. And I doubt it'd help me anyway." Ed said.

"You won't know unless you try, kid." Griffin corrected him, catching the attention of both Edward and Riza. "I actually find it rather relaxing, or at least as relaxing as I could, all things considered."

…

"Are we done yet? I'm ready to go back to the Colonel and report this crappy mission already…"

"Be patient, Edward. Thank you for everything, Sir." Riza said, holding a hand to her head out of respect for the veteran.

"Don't mention it." Griffin replied. "And your son is rather feisty, but he seems to have a good heart. Look after him."

"I will, sir." Riza smirked, not even bothering to correct Griffin on the fact that Edward was not her son.

…

"Hey, Lieutenant…?" Edward murmured, as they were walking back to the car.

"What is it, Edward?" Riza spared him a brief glance. *He's had a downcast and dejected look in his eyes all day.*

"You don't think that um…" Edward trailed off into silence, unable to finish his sentence at first. However, after a moment, he seemed to force himself to finish his thought. "You don't think that Al and the Colonel just wanted to get away from me, do you?"

Riza was shocked. *Why would he ask that...?*

"No, Ed, the Colonel probably felt that you wouldn't want to be stuck at the office all day, so that's why he had you come with me on this mission. And the truth is... your brother… While he did say he was going to study Alkehestry, he also went to the library to get a better understanding of what you've been doing to yourself, so he can help you."

"He doesn't have to do that…" Edward muttered, but didn't speak any further about it.

"You're right, Ed, he doesn't have to, but he is, because he cares about you." Riza replied, without receiving any response in return. "Hey, I have an idea. Before we head back why don't we go somewhere to eat? I'm sure you're hungry by now."

Edward looked at her excitedly. "You mean it? Where to?"

When is the thought of food not enough to get Edward all amped up?

"Hmm, I don't know, do you have some where in mind?" Riza smiled a bit.

"Well, there is this really good restaurant east of central command..."

...

So Griffin was innocent after, all…

Roy was still trying to piece things together.

This makes matters much more complicated.

Who could be behind it?

…

A/N: I hope this turned out fine. Arg… I suck at mysteries and missions and stuff, but I have to get through it! However, I will be putting the murder stuff on hold for a while, at least a couple chapters maybe, for now I will be focusing on Ling, Ed, Al, Riza and Roy for a bit.

Decide for Yourself (Part 1)

Story: It Is What It Is, Chapter 19

Disclaimer: I don't own FMA.

MANAGING 5 CHARACTERS AT A TIME IS HELL! T-T

I also had a lot of trouble writing for Ling in this chapter, he's so happy, yet he has some of the best inspirational moments with Greed, it's just hard to get him right.

Omake for previous chapter(Made by one of my friends, who also helped me with the information and passage about the chemical compounds in the previous chapter, which has been revised by the way, if any of you are interested.):

Ed: *smug* You just wish you could make awesome dolls like these.

Roy: If by 'awesome' you mean 'in appalling taste', sure.

…

When everybody, except Roy, had returned, the smell of cooking broccoli had filled the kitchen.

Alphonse had temporarily went to the guest bedroom to put up some books he'd apparently checked out at the library. When Edward was, even momentarily, left to his own thoughts, however, he began to wonder why Roy hadn't come by yet. He said he was going to. Did he say he was going to just to be nice? Had something bad happened? *Nah, he's probably just being held back by some paperwork or something. He* is *dealing with that murder case...*

I still don't know what that guy thinks of me half the time… We banter and argue a lot, but then he turns around and tells me that I should give myself more credit, even though I'm the reason Hughes is-

"So what's for dinner? It smells delicious." Ling's voice cut him out of his thoughts.

Edward jumped, glaring at him. "What are *you* doing he-?!"

Riza immediately had her concealed carry out in a flash and was pointing it at Ling. "Who are you?"

"W-w-wait! Hold on, Lieutenant." Edward jumped in between them. "This is Ling, one of my friends. He's from Xing."

Under normal circumstances, Edward would have never admitted to seeing Ling as his friend, but this was kind of an emergency.

Much to Edward's and Ling's relief, Riza lowered her gun, albeit still a bit suspicious.

"Xing?" She inquired, as a thoughtful look filled her gaze. "Hold on, but isn't that all the way across the desert…?"

"Yes, it is, but this idiot prince here got the brilliant idea of crossing the desert in search of the stone. I tried to tell him he shouldn't try to seek after it, but, like a dumbass, he wouldn't listen."

Did Ed just say Prince? This boy is a prince*?*

"Hey, lighten up on the 'idiot' stuff, will you?" Ling wined.

"No way, I'm only saying it because it's *true*. Only an idiot crosses a desert without proper food and water." Edward lightly hit him on the head. "And only an even *bigger* idiot would continue to seek out the philosopher's stone despite the warnings to stay away from it."

In reality, Edward knew that he would have sounded like a total hypocrite to those who knew his situation, because he had looked for the stone for two years. However, getting Ling too deeply involved in this was dangerous. He didn't want the same thing to happen to Ling that happened to Hughes.

"Oh, Ling, you came!" Alphonse said excitedly, coming back in.

"Hey, Alphonse! I was wondering where you were." Ling held up a hand. Riza was still currently cooking, but decided to let them to their own devices.

"Hang on, Al, are you the one who invited him?" Edward asked. *And how did he even get in?!*

Unknowingly, that was a question Riza also had. Well, as it turned out, she'd be checking all of the doors and windows later after this.

"Yes, and he's here to help you, brother." Alphonse told him.

"Help me...? What are you…? ...Wait, you *told* him?!" Edward exclaimed incredulously, jumping up from his chair and slamming a hand on the surface of the table. *He told Ling, of all people. Great, Ling will probably think I'm crazy now. This is the last thing I needed. I suppose it's not as bad as Winry, but still.*

Alphonse jumped a bit, but he had expected this. He could take it. "Please, try to calm down, Ed. I just want you to get better-"

"Better? You think this is gonna make me get better?! Telling each and every single one of our '*friends'* that I cut myself?!" Edward retorted.

"Yes, I just want you to be able to *smile* again…!" Alphonse insisted.

Riza observed from the side, debating whether or not to intervene. *He seems harmless… But I should probably keep an eye on him to be absolutely certain.*

Oh, Great, I'm almost sounding like Roy...

Edward didn't know what to think at this point. He couldn't deny the guilt welling up in his chest at hearing Alphonse's last words, but it wasn't that long ago that Ling had had his bodyguards attack him and Alphonse, so *why?* "...Why do you trust him so much, Al...?"

Edward desperately wanted to know.

Riza turned off the stovetop and began draining the water from the pot.

"Because… he's been down the same path you're going…" Alphonse trailed off into silence.

It took a moment for to realize what Alphonse was implying.

"Wait, you mean…" Edward's eyes widened, before he turn to look at Ling. "No, that can't be, Ling, you *wouldn't*…"

"Unfortunately, what he's saying is true, Ed..." Ling said grimly.

"But why…? You always seem so happy." Edward wanted to know, his voice sounding of pain and disbelief.

Ling couldn't put it into any specific reason why. For one, his family had kept putting pressure on him to be a certain way, He got called weak by his siblings for not being able to use Alkahestry, was told that he would make a terrible Emperor without it. He didn't have any close friends, wasn't allowed to because his family was afraid of further assassination attempts. Every single aspect of his life was distantly controlled by his father and *his* standards.

"I did it for several reasons, actually… But I think I mainly wanted a sense of control." Ling said. "And at the time, I thought it was helping me, I thought it was making everything better, but it wasn't. It was only making my hypoglycemic spells worse and it was hurting the few people in my life who knew and genuinely cared. More importantly, it was ruining my life. So, finally, I swore to myself to never again let my family or anybody else decide my worth or tell me what I can or can't do with my own life. I told myself that I would decide on my own who I am. And that's where I am now."

Edward didn't know what to think about now. Ling and Roy both had issues with this… Both of them had overcome them.

If they could, maybe *he* could.

"Ling, I… I had no idea…" Edward mumbled, suddenly finding admiration for Ling just as he had for Roy. "I think you're amazing, but... I'm not sure if I ever could be as strong as you…"

"No, you're wrong, Ed, you *can* and you *will*… It may take time, but don't *ever* doubt yourself..." Ling murmured.

Edward was silent for a moment, before speaking. "...Over the past few weeks, I've seen how cutting hurt those around me… How it's hurt Al… And I want to stop, I don't like being this way, but the temptation… It's still there, Ling, no matter what I do...!" Edward's voice choked

up as he squeezed his arm, but tried his best to refuse the urge to scratch. "What if it never goes away...?! What if I *can't*-!"

Riza and Alphonse were both preparing to rush over, but Edward seemed to calm down when Ling reached out and took his hands. The physical contact distracted him a bit, especially as Ling began rubbing his hands for stimulation.

"Pull yourself together, Ed…!" Ling said. "It *won't* ever go away *completely*… But you still have to fight against it, even when it's hard to, even when you want more than anything to give in all together, and when you can't fight it alone, you have people around that will fight against it with you… But you have to let them in first."

Let them in, huh…?

Edward looked up at Riza and Alphonse, wondering whether he should open up about some of what had been bothering him lately or not, when Roy's voice interrupted his thoughts.

"Well said, Prince of Xing." Roy entered in that moment approaching them. "I couldn't have said it better myself."

Edward was truthfully happy to see him, although he wouldn't admit it.

"Yes," Riza said, laying some broccoli and cream of mushroom on the table with some bowls. "I was trying to tell him this morning that he can always trust us. But he just gave me one of those "okay"s like you used to, Roy."

"Ah, is that so… I suppose we have a little bit of work to do then. But first thing's first… Let's eat." Roy said, coming over to the table.

"And am I *starved*." Ling smiled innocently.

Edward glared, and pushed him back. "Who said you could join?! Go get your own food!"

Riza bopped him lightly on the head. "Play nice and eat, Ed."

...

A/N: I finally got to PART of the conversation. A vERY special surprise is coming up soon, though(in the next few chapters). :D

Going back to work today, so I'm not sure when I'll be able to post again. Maybe tomorrow, or maybe in a few days. Possibly next week. Right now I've hit a really inspirational streak.

I personally think Ling has gained people who respect him(Fu and Lan Fan), because of his not caring what other people think of him. He's bold and brazen and will pursue becoming emperor regardless of what others have to say. As such that 'not caring what other people think of him' thing, is what would give him that leadership quality. A leader must have confidence in themselves before they can hope for others to have confidence in them.

Sorry that probably made no sense.

Decide For Yourself (Part 2)

Story: It Is What It Is, Chapter 20

Disclaimer: I don't own FMA.

There will be one more part to "Decide For Yourself".

It can be assumed in my book that the Sherlock Holmes novels existed in this world(Or at least I'm going to have it that way, hope you all don't mind), but revolved more around alchemy than just the normal stuff in the novels, at least if we go by the logic that the FMA world is based on our own world, just that it's kind of what it **would** ***have been if we had alchemy and stuff. Or SOMETHING like that.***

I know it seems like I shorthanded the potential between Roy and Ed in this, but I have plans for later, so don't worry.

Also, ROYAI scene ahead. BUT a lso a trigger warning for mention of past sexual assault. (Based entirely off of one of my own personal experiences, so please try to bare with me, or hate me as you all probably will)

Sorry this turned out more about Riza and Roy... But the next chapter will be all about Ed, as I have something very special prepared hurhurhur. (And there will be more bonding on Ling's and Ed's part next chapter. This just kind of shows the brief beginning of their blooming friendship.

I really hope y'all don't hate me for this shit. I'm probably going to lose so many followers for this... Sexual assault is a traumatizing thing, and unfortunately, women were so few and far between back then. As a result, they get targeted. Furthermore, rape happens very often in the military. It won't be explicit or anything, but I am basing it off of one of my own experiences(I say that a lot, but I've BEEN through a lot, so this whole story is very personal to me..). IF YOU ARE COMPLETELY UNCOMFORTABLE WITH RIZA HAVING DEALT WITH IT IN THE PAST AND ROY WANTING TO SLAUGHTER THE PERSON WHO DID IT TO HER, JUST LET ME KNOW, PLEASE. I will take it out.

...

"So, if you don't mind, I'd like to know why you cut yourself..." Ling managed to ask after a long silence had filled the room. Everybody seemed to be looking at him expectantly

Edward was quiet for a moment, trying to think of some way to put it. Before, he thought it was a distraction, but now he wasn't so sure.

"It helps me..." Edward murmured the same thing he had said to Alphonse... He didn't feel comfortable with so many people watching him.

"Be more specific, Ed. How does it help you?" Ling probed.

"*I* don't *know, okay?*..." Edward muttered. He really couldn't think. Didn't want to discuss this.

"Do you get a rush when you do it?" Ling wanted to know.

"Yeah." Edward nodded, finding that much easy to answer. "And it's *intoxicating*. It's like... what I can't let out through crying or whatever, I can let out through the blood."

"Hm..." Ling thought about it for a second. "I had initially thought of meditation, but for the time being, if the color and stimulation is what satisfies you, why don't you try using a red pen on your skin...?"

"Yes, I read about that in a book, Brother." Alphonse interjected. "Although it was a marker, I imagine a pen will be just as good..."

As long as Ed doesn't transmute the pen into something sharper...

Edward was clearly skeptical, but caved. "Yeah, I doubt it'll help, but I can try."

...

Over the course of the next few weeks, Edward had surprisingly found the suggestion of the red pen to help some, and he also seemed to like having his hair braided and played with, at least when the urges weren't as bad. Ling had came over occasionally to check up on Edward(and get free meals, of course). Even if it was a short amount of time, Edward found himself becoming rather attached to Ling.

Roy was, of course, a little suspicious by how close they were getting, seeing as he was a foreigner with possible ulterior motives, but Riza scolded him and was just glad that Edward was making a friend.

...

"Hey, Ed, do you ever read anything besides Alchemy books?" Ling randomly asked Edward one day.

"Hm?" Edward was a bit taken aback by the question, but he decided to answer. "Oh, well, I kind of like sci-fi and detective novels."

"Detective? Oh, have you ever heard of Sherlock?" Ling wanted to know.

"Yeah, but the books are nothing that great." Edward said. Of course, that was a lie. But something in him was just wanting to be cynical. He didn't want to grow any more attached to Ling than he already had. And books were a sure-fire way some people could bond.

"Well, that's a little disappointing." Ling said, making Edward feel somewhat guilty. "I always thought they were *good*. Back in Xing, there was a lot of censorship and banning of books from other countries, so I didn't really have access to many books other than political propaganda, since my father had control over what I was even *allowed* to read. Fortunately some relatives of mine smuggled them in for me."

In reality, Ling knew his relatives from the rival clans had only provided the books to him to try and corrupt him, and in hopes of later outing him having those books to the Emperor. However, Ling had been smart enough to hide them well and immediately get rid of the books once he was done reading them.

"I actually really enjoy reading fiction when I can. It's like an escape, to be able be a part of a different world, and to even be able to experience happiness and different emotions through somebody else's story... I think it's amazing..."

After hearing Ling's story, Edward caved in, giving a small blush and averting his gaze. "Yeah, I lied, okay? The Sherlock novels *were* pretty good."

"Aren't they, though? It's fascinating how Sherlock is able to put together crimes with the smallest of clues. Clues that are so obvious, but yet nobody notices them! Oh, man, Sherlock is a genius! Although John puts up with a lot because of him too, I almost feel bad for him. Say what was your favorite book?"

Why did Ling have to be so enthusiastic like Hughes at times...?

"Probably *"A Study In Scarlet"* or *"The Adventure of the Final Problem"*, I guess...?"

At the mention of "A Study in Scarlet", Edward suddenly began to think about the Taxi driver, and how his actions mirrored that of Gerhard, Kanon's father, with the forced suicide and several other aspects.

"Those are good too. But I kind of like *"The Sign of Four"* and *"The Valley of Fear"*..." Ling said.

"Yeah, *"A Sign of Four"* is definitely a good one..." Edward said absentmindedly.

Could Gerhard have possibly been trying to imitate the killer from that book, or was it just a coincidence? Either way, the guy was a nut. He supposed it didn't matter.

"Maybe you should try reading more fiction, Ed. It helped *me*." Ling suggested yet another coping mechanism.

"Yeah, maybe." Edward smiled a bit, even though he had next to intention of actually considering it. It couldn't possibly help him any more than the pen had, which was only so much. Besides, any reading he did needed to be about alchemy, in hopes of finding a way to get Alphonse his body back.

...

At some point, however, the urges began to get worse. Between Roy and especially Riza and Alphonse constantly asking to check his arms, not to mention his guilt over Hughes becoming more pressing when around Roy, he felt suffocated. Heck, he could hardly even use the *bathroom* alone without everybody being paranoid he was going to cut himself again.

For that matter, it only made him *want* to...

He wanted more than anything to open up to somebody about the temptations and urges, but Ling was right, the urges would never completely go away, and he didn't want to be selfish, so what was point?

...

"Still not sleeping...?"

Riza looked up over at Roy who was standing by her bedroom door.

"I can't..." Riza murmured. She was sitting on her bed. "I've *tried*, Roy..."

This was the same thing that had happened back when Roy was both cutting *and* burning himself. She had lost sleep, wasn't able to function as well as she used to.

"But the thought of what could happen if you left him alone terrifies you, right?" Roy tried to guess her thoughts. "Look, I think you should try to avoid worrying so much. He may be a kid, but he's a lot stronger than we've been giving him credit for. And if we keep pushing him like this, he might *really* do something..."

Riza, with weary and sleep-deprived eyes gawked at him incredulously. "...What are you *saying*? He nearly *died*. How can I *not* worry? And do you honestly believe we should just leave him to his own devises so soon after-" Riza started to ask, but was cut off by Roy.

"No, calm down, Lieutenant. I'm not saying that at all. *Everybody* is worried about him, just as they have a right to be, but you've been *obsessing* over this, to the point you haven't had *any* sleep, and Ed is clearly becoming suffocated." Roy said.

Riza thought about it for a long time. *I don't want to admit it, but Ed's well-being is at stake... I can't keep stressing him out like this...*

"...I guess you're right... It's odd... You really do sound like Brigadier General Hughes at times..." Riza said, deep in thought.

"Really...? Yeah, I guess he rubbed off on me a bit, huh...?" Roy smirked sadly. "Anyway, try to get some rest, Lieutenant. You'll need it."

"Please, Roy, promise me you'll look after Ed for me while I'm asleep, and don't let him do anything reckless."

"You didn't have to ask."

...

Blood.

There were corpses and blood everywhere.

Corpses of children.

Corpses of Ishvalans.

Even corpses of their own soldiers.

Everything was either on fire or destroyed.

The sound of gunfire, screaming and crying was all that could be heard.

The smell of smoke and death had filled the air.

Her eyes were lifeless, her finger was tired of pulling the trigger, but she continued to shoot. Over and over and over again. After all, it was orders. And on this battlefield, it was kill or be killed.

But when would it stop? Would it ever?

Her hands. They would forever be stained.

The gun. It was such a powerful and deadly weapon. Practically a double edged sword. For every time she took another life, it felt almost like she was taking a part of her own life with her.

When would it end?

"*Lieutenant, hey, are you okay?"*

She paid the voice no mind at first. Somebody else must have got hurt, or killed, one, she simply assumed.

She just wanted it to stop completely. This endless cycle of meaningless slaughter. The cries of children as their parents were killed in front of them.

The feeling of just wanting to-

"*Lieutenant, wake up."*

Riza's eyes opened with a jolt, before she looked up at Roy, who was gazing down at her in concern.

"Colonel…" she mumbled, the tears spilling from her eyes. "I'm sorry. I just..."

"Was remembering Ishval, right...?" Roy said, wiping some of the tears from her face. The scars on his arm were somehow visible, even in the dark.

"...Yes…" Riza murmured, looking away.

"I should be the one apologizing, you know…" Roy said, averting his gaze.

"For what?" Riza raised an eyebrow, reverting her attention to him. *Why is he apologizing?*

"If it weren't for me leading you into the military, you would have never…" Roy couldn't finish his sentence.

Riza was silent for a moment before speaking. "...I accepted things long ago, Roy. You didn't make me do anything. I joined for the same reason you did, because I wanted to improve the system from the inside. And now… there's nothing we can do but move forward. You and I both know that..."

Roy didn't say anything in return, but was clearly deep in thought. Riza looked down at his arms. In the dim lighting of the moon, multiple scars could be made out, from burns to cuts. "...Your arms are bare... Are you okay with not wearing long sleeves...?"

"Well, there's no need to hide them with you, is there? After all, you already know about it…" Roy murmured.

"Yes, I suppose that's true." Riza could tell, however. She could tell that Roy was, in reality, testing to see if Riza felt comfortable being around him with his scars visible. She sat up next to him, preparing to say something when Roy spoke first.

"Tell me… What do you see when you look at them?" He asked in a low voice, not entirely certain what he was expecting her to say in response.

Riza was taken aback by the question, but took his hands, smiling softly at him.

"...I just see *you*." she said. It was at that moment that their eyes met. Roy suddenly found her and her messy hair more astounding than ever, her alluring brown eyes reflecting the moonlight. The temptation to kiss her and the insecurity he'd been feeling suddenly became too much to bare, and without thinking, he leaned forward, meeting her lips with his. Riza was taken aback at first but didn't push him away. She offered him entrance and returned the kiss in full, reaching up to wrap her arms around him.

He pulled her closer, both of them soaking in the warmth they so desperately needed from each other, as he began to slide a hand up her loosely hanging shirt, completely lost in the passionate oscillation. However, it didn't last long.

"Don't…" Riza snapped him out of his trance, pulling away, a conflicted look on her face.

Roy suddenly felt worse than ever. How could he lose control like that? If the higher ups had found, he would have been in so much trouble, and Riza would have been taken away from him. "Sorry… I shouldn't have done that. I don't know what came over me..."

"No, it's not you..." Riza said, looking away.

"Wait, what do you...?" Roy looked up at her, but she didn't respond instead turning away almost as if *she* was guilty of something. Suddenly the realization sunk in and Roy was beside himself. "Oh *god*..., Riza, did somebody... *hurt* you?"

The word 'rape' or 'assault' wouldn't come out. They were too painful to say.

Riza was silent for a long time. "It was years ago... They had taken my gun and everything, so I didn't really know how to react at the time. But it's not important now."

Roy disagreed entirely, especially since she was clearly affected by it still. *'They'... There were more than one?!*

"I'm so sorry..." Roy choked out, pulling her into an embrace.

The thought that somebody had even *dared* to lay their hand on one of his own precious subordinates, let alone *Riza*, regardless of how far it had got, filled him to the brim with *rage.* But he had to stay calm, for *her*.

"Why are you apologizing...? It's okay now..." Riza insisted.

Roy shook his head. "No, it's *not*. I should have *known* something, but I *didn't*."

"That's not your fault, Roy." Riza said, "I kept it from everybody because I felt it was just much easier to avoid discussing it."

"That's just like you..." Roy murmured, tears threatening to fall from his eyes. More than anything, he wanted to know who had done it to her, but he knew she was not ready to discuss it, so he decided to leave it for now. However, he wanted her to know that he was there for her. "I know it probably won't mean a lot, but if you ever need to talk... I'm here for you..."

Riza almost seemed to smile. "Thank you, sir..."

- *End of Chapter*

...

A/N: I hope that turned out okay, for the people who weren't scared off. Next chapter will be a special one!

Decide For Yourself (Part 3)

Story: It Is What It Is, Chapter 21
Disclaimer: I don't own FMA.

This part has a lot of lose ends that have yet to be concluded, but I will try to do what I can in the next few chapters to complete it. And I'm sorry, I realized after writing it that it'll actually be the next chapter that'll be special... Ugh I feel so bad now. I SUCK AT MYSTERIES SO TRY NOT TO HATE ME

...

They say that solitary confinement can make people go insane...

...

===ALSO : IMPORTANT: I'm going to act like the killer has been targeting Roy's acquaintances, and go back and edit it later.===

Three days Later

"Colonel...!" Riza came barging into Roy's office. She was out of breath, her face contorted with uncharacteristic dread. "Pardon my interruption, sir, but Edward is missing...!"

Roy's eyes widened in response, as he stood up. *"What?!"*

...

At first, it had seemed like a good idea, he thought he could handle looking for this mass murderer on his own. He knew the chance of running into the killer would be next to nothing; pure luck, but, to wander off on his own to get a breather, to get some time to himself had seemed favorable for him at the moment. It was a risk he was willing to take.

But he had been in over his head. Originally, it had seemed to go well. That evening, he ran into a middle aged blond male who introduced himself as Isaac.

"It's pretty late for a child like yourself to be all the way out here. Where are your parents, little one?"

Edward held back every urge to slap the guy for calling him 'little one'. It was obvious the man was up to no good, and he simply *smelt* of danger. *Maybe if I act like a helpless child, I'll get to see what this guy is* really *about.*

"They're not from around here. You see, I'm kind of lost." Edward smiled, feigning awkwardness. "Could you maybe show me around so I could get back home?"

"Of course I can, but first why don't we get you something to eat first? I'm sure you must be hungry." Isaac told him. Edward didn't know if this was really the killer or not, but he decided he could use this as a golden opportunity to find out.

However, it was only because he let down his guard enough that he didn't think much of the offer or expect the food to be poisoned. But in the moment that he was on the floor throwing up due to the level of toxicity, a wet rag reeking of ether was clamped over his nose and mouth.

Chloroform. Edward's eyes widened as he swung an automail elbow behind him, downing the assailant with a pained grunt.

"So you finally showed your true self, huh?" Edward smirked. However, there was apparently more than just one attacker that had showed up and before Edward could clap his hands together to transmute his metal arm into a blade they had grabbed each of his arms, the first man clambering back to his feet to knee Edward hard in the gut and forcing the air from his lungs.

Edward could hardly remember how to breathe when the chloroform soaked rag returned to his face. They pinned Edward, who was kicking and twisting, to the ground.

Shit... I guess I underestimated them.

It was only a matter of time before Edward felt the world around him fade to black.

...

When he awoke, he found his automail leg and arm missing, and his skin arm bound by some kind of chain above his head. Judging by his surroundings, he appeared to be in some kind of basement.

Damn it, I screwed up. This isn't the first time I've underestimated and failed to defeat my opponent in the last month. I have to find a way to get out of here...

"Hello, child. How's the room? I hope it's to your liking." Isaac's voice said, as he entered the room.

"Isaac!" Edward shouted. "You bastard! What did you do with my automail?"

"I destroyed it of course." Isaac said simply.

Edward's eyes widened at hearing that. *Dammit, Winry's going to kill me for this! That is if I can even find a way to get away in the first place.*

"Come now, don't give me that face." Isaac mocked. "I couldn't just let you continue roaming around with them, could I? They might have got in the way of my plans."

"What plans are we talking about? Why are you kidnapping and killing people?" Edward glared at him.

"Well, you're going to die in about a week anyway, so I suppose it doesn't matter. If you must know, I want to weaken Colonel Roy Mustang's support network."

"What?" Edward's eyes widened slightly. He felt sick.

"Think about it." Isaac smirked. "If everybody he loves and cares about is getting killed, he'll become vulnerable and therefore lose his overall effectiveness as a soldier. As such, Mustang won't be able to showcase his abilities as well and it will thus halt his climb up the ladder. On top of that, the bigwigs are liable to start suspecting *him* of murder."

"You're wrong, pops." Edward rolled his eyes. "The Colonel isn't the type to let his emotions impact his work, least of all the opportunity for a promotion. Anybody who knows him would know that."

In reality, that wasn't entirely the truth, but he was simply trying his best to keep from dying.

"So they say." Isaac noted. "But we won't know for sure until we try, right?"

"All you're doing is pointless slaughter!" Edward shouted at him.

Isaac barely spared him a glance. "Be that as it may, *I don't care*."

...

It had been a couple days, he was sure. He hadn't eaten anything, was no closer to finding a way out of this mess, and he felt like he was going insane from the dead silence. This was worse than the hospital, he decided. Back there, at least there was Roy and Riza and the beeping of machines to keep him company. Here, there was *nobody*. He was *alone*. And for anybody else, they may have been able to handle it, but for Edward, the loneliness was unbearable, and the silence and lack of warmth was pure torture.

It had only been *two days* or so and he already felt like he was *dying on the inside*.

...

"Ammonia, Nitrogen, Phosphorus, Nitroglycerin, Helium, Hydrogen, Pneumonia, nitrogen trihydride**,** Aluminium sulfate..."

By the fourth day, Edward had learned to pass the time by listing different chemicals. It actually helped a lot more than he thought it would, as it was better distraction than none to hear his own voice.

...

On the fifth day, his stomach felt like it was on fire due to lack of food, he felt weak, his entire body was shaking, his hair was oily, and he couldn't sleep... This must have been their intention. To tear him down and weaken him, before killing him.

And it was working. He was beginning to wonder if he was going to be saved at all, if Roy and Riza would find him in time. He began to wonder if the others really would miss him if

something happened to him in the end? He wasn't that likable of a person. He was constantly bitter and wearing down on the nerves and patience of those around him. And he could only ever cause trouble for those he cared about.

No...

He couldn't think like this. Ling wouldn't approve of it.

Alphonse was counting on him to help him get his body back, was counting on him to be there by his side as his brother. Mustang would tell him to keep his head held high. Riza would tell him that they would be coming soon and to endure it just a little while more. He couldn't give in just yet.

But what could he do?

If he got out of here alive, he would never get so cocky to think he could handle a mass murderer alone like this again. More importantly, how could he have been so stupid to take food from a stranger?

Mustang would never let him live it down if he found out.

...

"I think I finally realize what's going on." Roy said, catching the attention of Riza, as he looked through some records on his desk. "Pretty much all of the victims of this killer are people that I know. That means whoever's doing this must be trying to get at me somehow."

"Do you have any idea of who it could be, sir...?" Riza wanted to know.

"Not a clue." Roy said grimly. "All we can do is keep searching for any leads we can-."

Knock.

Knock.

"Come in." Roy responded to the door knocking.

"Sir..." A man stepped in. Beside him stood a girl about eight or nine years old, clutching at her dress.

"Karen. Hey there, kid." Roy smiled, as he moved over to kneel in front of her. "Do you need something?"

Karen was quiet for a long moment, a troubled expression on her face as she refused to look up at him. Roy's smile was replaced by a darker expression as he glanced up at the sergeant, who was also her father.

Under normal circumstances, children weren't supposed to be inside of the premises, but Central Command had been in chaos because of Scar, and these other killings, so there had been next to no regulation.

"She claims to know who the one behind the kidnappings is. I brought her to you since you're the one in charge of that case..."

"I see. Thank you." Roy said, nodding in response. "You can leave it to me."

"Sir." The sergeant saluted before exiting the room.

"Would you like some water?" Roy asked Karen, who shook her head in response.

"How about you take a seat on the couch then?" Roy gestured. Karen complied and did as asked.

Roy didn't know if it was true or not, since other children had came forward with ridiculous stories. Karen was just a child, but at this point, even the smallest possibility was better than nothing. He had to find Edward, no matter the costs. Of course, it wasn't that he thought Edward was weak, but even *he* had his limits. The boy wasn't invincible, especially not without his auto-mail, in the off chance they taken it from him.

Riza stood by the side, deciding to let Roy handle this.

...

"So you're saying you saw a guy luring somebody off?" Roy asked.

"Mhm." Karen nodded.

"Can you by any chance give us a description of this man?" Roy probed.

"He was pale-skinned, had short blond hair, blue eyes, a couple dents on the left side of his forehead, and he was probably about 6 foot."

For a child, Karen had certainly picked up on quite a bit. But what was more concerning were the dents that she had mentioned.

I could have sworn I knew somebody that fit this description...

That's it...!

Roy couldn't believe he hadn't seen it before. He looked to Riza with a sense of urgency. "Lieutenant, bring me all the case files regarding Isaac Kerr."

Riza's eyes widened for a moment and she froze, he feet glued to the floor.

"Is there a problem?" Roy asked, raising an eyebrow.

Riza looked like she desperately wanted to say something, but she didn't in the end. "No, sir... I'll be on it right away."

...

Edward was snapped out of his daze by the voice of Isaac, who had come into the room for the first time in nearly a week.

"And how are you today, sunshine? You look even better than you did when I saw you the first time." Isaac approached him, smirking.

Within an instant, Edward used whatever strength he had left to pull himself up with the chain and swing himself to kick Isaac in the face. "Rot in hell, Isaac."

Immediately after, Edward felt his body go limp from the strain.

"Sorry, I can't do that." Isaac shrugged it off, before smirking again. "After all, I'd rather keep my life for now if I can help it. But *your* life on the other hand... That's very expendable to me, as far as I'm concerned. I wouldn't even lose sleep over your death."

"Is that so?" Another voice interjected. It was Roy's. "I suppose we'll have a bit of an issue then. *I*, for one, *would* lose at least a *little* sleep if one of my fellow men were to die."

Edward slowly looked up at Mustang, before smiling weakly. "About damn time, you bastard..."

"Yeah, sorry I was so late, kid." Roy gave a pained smirk, noticing the disheveled state Edward was in, and the fact that his automail was gone, angry that the boy had had to go through this, but then he looked back at Isaac, his fingers ready to snap. "Step away from Fullmetal. Otherwise, I guarantee that this won't be a very pleasant evening for you."

Riza entered moments later by his side, holding up a gun.

"Mustang..." Isaac glared, before surprisingly complying as he turned his attention to Riza. "*Oh,* and it's *you. Did you come back for more?* I always knew you'd miss me *eventually, Riza..."*

Riza's eyes immediately widened at the man's words, her gun trembling momentarily, not going unnoticed by Roy, before she did her best to regain her composure. "Put your hands up where we can see them."

"Not gonna let me off the hook, hon? Too bad." Isaac sighed. Unlike Gerhard had done, he immediately tried to resist and fight back. However, Mustang, barely holding back, singed his hands with his flames, leaving him screaming in agony and unable to even think of using his alchemy.

"Now you'll think twice before *ever* using those filthy hands of yours *again*, Isaac." Roy said, glaring down at him in some satisfaction, but his mind still clouded with the desire for revenge for hurting both Riza and Edward. He was about to give into the temptation to burn him more, but Riza's voice cut him off.

"Ed, are you okay? Has he *hurt* you anywhere?" Riza asked, rushing over to Edward. Roy then decided to call in the other troops to take care of the situation.

"No, I'm fine, just... kind of hungry..." Edward smiled a bit, wishing he could forget that he'd been here for a whole week without food and that he'd been utterly alone the whole time, to forget the deafening silence he had endured. Somebody had brought him some water at one point, and he couldn't begin to imagine why, but it didn't matter. Because he was more grateful than ever to see Roy and Riza.

I could have died...

He knew this, but he told himself that he had to stay strong.

Riza felt a wave of relief wash over her at knowing that Edward probably hadn't gone through what she had. However, she still felt a huge pang of guilt due to how long it had taken them to find him and the fact that his automail had been taken away from him.

...

"Hey, Colonel,...?"

Roy looked over at Edward, who was in the seat beside him. They were in the car headed home, Riza driving.

"What is it?"

Edward was silent for a long moment, before finally speaking... "Do you... Do you blame me for Hughes getting killed?"

His shoulders were shaking, his bangs shadowing his eyes. He felt a lump in his throat.

Roy's eyes widened at the question. Where was this coming from? How many other things did he blame himself for that he had no control over?

"No, of course not." Roy said. "Why would you even ask such a thing? I would *never* blame you for his death, and nor would Hughes."

"But if I hadn't told him what I *did*, he would still be here...!" Edward snapped back.

"Whether that's true or not isn't the issue. The fact is you're not the one who pulled the trigger, Ed... So stop it."

Edward didn't respond, but Roy liked to believe that Edward got the message. Edward might not even accept it at first, but Roy would tell him the same thing no matter how many times he had to.

...

"Brother, thank god, you're okay! I was so worried about you!" Alphonse pulled Edward into a bare hug, Riza and Roy smirking a bit in the background. "Ling will be so glad to know you're not hurt! But what happened to your automail?!"

"That wackjob psychopath apparently destroyed it, or at least that's what he *said*." Edward said casually.

"Well... I guess it's about time for your maintenance anyways, isn't it?" Alphonse asked.

"Come to think of it, you're right." Edward replied, before shuttering at the thought of Winry nagging over him getting his automail taken from him. "But it's gonna be such a hassle..."

What about the cuts and scars on my arms? What would she think if she saw them...?

Either way, It's not really like I have a choice in the matter...

"Oh, come on, don't be like that. Ed. Winry just worries about you a lot." Alphonse said.

"If by 'worries a lot', you mean bites my head off over every little thing, then sure." Edward replied with a dry sarcasm.

If Alphonse had a body, he would have been sweat dropping at Edward's stubbornness.

"We should probably call her..." Alphonse suggested.

"Yeah, I know..."

...

A/N: This turned out pretty bad in my opinion. I don't have the talent for suspense. AND "Decide for Yourself" IS APPARENTLY GOING TO HAVE ANOTHER PART, BUT I SWEAR THE NEXT ONE WILL BE THE LAST ONE, AND THEN WE'LL GET ON WITH OTHER STUFF.

Decide For Yourself (Part 4)

Story: It Is What It Is, Chapter 22
Disclaimer: I don't own FMA

I FINALLY FINISHED "Decide for Yourself"!

And thank you so much for all the follows and favs.

This chapter probably seems so unbalanced with character time, I'm so sorry ugh, but now I have even more characters I'm trying to manage. I'm only trying to focus on what's important.

...

"How are you feeling?" Roy's voice snapped Riza out of her thoughts, as he came into the bedroom and took a seat beside her.

Riza was silent for a while, before finally speaking. "It was so long ago, yet I still let him get to me, Roy..."

"That's perfectly normal for somebody in your situation..." Roy tried to reassure her that her hesitation was normal.

"It's ironic... Despite what he did to me, I couldn't even bring myself to hate him." Riza murmured, sure that Roy would be disgusted with her. "But when I thought he had done the same thing to Edward... I was ready to kill him."

Roy simply pulled her into an embrace. "If it hadn't been for you, I probably *would* have..."

…

"You accepted food from somebody you thought was a *killer*? That was real *smart, Fullmetal.*"

Edward inwardly cringed. He knew this was coming, he just hoped it wouldn't be right after all of this, but, *no*, Roy needed the report done *now.* Alphonse had went off to find Ling, since Edward told him that he was gonna wait a bit before getting Winry involved.

"Yeah, I was an *idiot*, okay? No need to remind *me, old man*. I already figured that much out by the third day I was in that place!" Edward groaned, knowing, however, that Roy was not gonna let him off the hook so easily.

"If I must remind you, this isn't the first time you've done things like this, Ed..." Roy said. "How many times have I told you not to let your guard down? But, no, you never listen. Rather than thinking things through, you just charge right in to get the quick pass. You run off on your own without thinking about anybody around you but yourself."

"I already know that...!" Edward already knew this stuff. He already knew that he was selfish. He already knew that he was often nothing but a burden and constantly causing trouble for everybody he cared about, just like he would be when he finally worked up the courage to call Winry about his automail. But he didn't need to hear it reiterated, least of all, by Mustang, who was one of the people whose words could cut him just as deep as a blade.

Roy was about to open his mouth again in response to say something else when Riza interjected.

"Edward, what the Colonel is trying to say," Riza briefly offered Roy a glance that said *'and failing at it',* as she walked over to Edward. "is that we were all worried about you. Why did you run off without saying anything?"

Riza, in reality, felt a bit frustrated because she, the renowned "Hawk's Eye", hadn't even seen Edward walk off. She had been talking to somebody and when she turned around, he was gone. She assumed by the third day he was gone that he had become entangled with the killer, which had terrified them both. The fact that Edward was kept there for a week instead of a few days was pure luck.

"If I had, you would have just followed me..." Edward murmured. "Besides, I thought that I'd have a better chance of luring him out if I was by myself. I didn't expect him to poison me through food. I expected him to attack me up front. That's why I..."

He clenched his fists. *I could have died... I could have* died*! How could I have been so stupid?!*

"So that's why you were caught off guard..." Roy sighed, deciding to let it go, despite how much he still wanted to scold Edward. Imagining the kid could have got killed wasn't a reality he particularly wanted to ignore right now. "I have one other question before I turn in my report, Fullmetal... What did Isaac do to you?"

Edward was silent for a moment, receiving expectant glances from both Riza and Roy.

Finally he spoke. "Well, aside from starving me, and taking my automail, he actually didn't do much to me..."

Come to think of it, it was odd. Isaac never once hit him or anything other than having his goonies' initially attack him with the chloroform to knock him out.

"But... the room I was in..." He looked down. "It was so small, so hot. And the silence... it was unbearable... I thought I was going to die." Edward choked out, tears welling up in his eyes. In many ways, staying in that empty cement basement, loosing track of days without food for an entire week had been torture enough in his mind. And the hunger pains certainly hadn't helped either.

He expected Roy or Riza to tell him 'It was just a room.' and mock him, but Roy didn't, instead saying something he least expected: "I'm sure you did... They say solitary confinement is considered one of the most brutal torture methods in prisons... Supposedly, it

can even make people go insane... Count yourself lucky, kid, that you weren't there any longer. Although I can only imagine it was bad enough..."

Edward was silent in response, before Riza spoke up.

"Yes, I'm so sorry you had to go through that... But, Edward, I want you to be completely honest with me. Are you absolutely certain he didn't do anything *else* to you?" Riza asked. Although she doubted that Isaac had done the same thing to him that he did to her, there was still a bit of lingering paranoia in her mind.

"Well, the guy was a creep. He called me something like *'Sunshine'..."* Edward took a pause to think about it. In truth, he was incredibly disturbed by the way Isaac had talked to him. It was like he had intentionally done it to make him realize his defenseless, to point out his vulnerability and mock him. But the boy kept it to himself, instead smirking and not wanting them to know just how much he was bothered by it. "Anyway, he pissed me off, so I kicked him in the face for it."

"Ah... So that's where that black eye of his came from..." Roy smirked to himself, finding amusement in it somehow.

Riza was worried for a second, but smiled sadly. She hoped more than anything that that really was all there was to it. "Well, just know you can always trust us, Ed..."

...

"Oh, Ed, I was so worried about you!" Ling immediately hugged Edward after seeing him. "I'm so glad you're okay!"

"Yeah, whatever, just get off of me...!" Edward pulled away, a blush on his face at the awkwardness.

"You should really be more careful, you know." Ling said, not letting go.

"Yeah, I've already received a lecture from Colonel Sarcasm, I don't need another one from you too, Ling." Edward grumbled.

"Well, that's rather harsh. I'm not lecturing you, Edward." Ling looked up at him seriously. "I really did miss you..."

Edward sighed, his face still a bit red. "I... I missed you too, Ling..."

In reality, it was more than that. Ling was one of the people keeping Edward going while he was in that basement; that had inspired Edward to not lose faith in his friends.

But he would never admit it.

…

Phones.

They were great communication devices.

They made it easy to get in touch with people far away with just the dial of a number.

But what about when one doesn't want to get in touch with somebody else, and they'd rather put it off as long as possible?

That was the situation Edward was in right now.

Everybody was looking at him expectantly, waiting for him to make a call to Winry.

"Do I have to...?" Edward groaned, more to himself than anybody else. He was used to getting automail repairs, but Winry was going to be infuriated when she found out that she would be having to make a new arm *and* leg from scratch. It'd take her at least a week.

"Come on, Ed. It'll only take take a few minutes..." Alphonse tried to reason.

"Fine..." Edward sighed, picking up the phone, and dialing the number.

Ring.

Ring.

Rin-

"Atelier Garfiel. This is Winry speaking."

"Uh... *Hey*, Winry." Edward smiled, a bit nervously.

"Oh, hey, Ed...! What's up?"

"Um... Well... I was wondering if you could come to Lieutenant Hawkeye's place when you get a chance...?" Edward said sheepishly.

"Sure, but what for? Don't tell me you busted your automail again!"

"Um... Actually, about that..." Edward murmured.

"You did*, didn't you...? God, Ed... What am I gonna do with you?"*

Edward wanted to say something in return, but he was too anxious to.

"Alright, I'll be there tomorrow evening. In the meantime, don't do anything reckless, okay?"

As if I could... "Alright. Thanks, Winry."

...

"What have you done to them?!" Winry's voice demanded, shocked by the fact that both of Ed's prosthetic limbs were gone. She had expected some damage, but not to *this* degree.

"Um, well you see, Winry… He-" Alphonse tried to speak, but was cut off.

"I don't even want to hear it, Al! WHY DO I EVEN BOTHER MAKING YOU GOOD AUTOMAIL WHEN YOU JUST GO AND IMMEDIATELY WRECK IT, ED?! I pour my heart and soul into making this automail, and you run off and get it all destroyed! Every other customer has the sense and manners to take care of their automail. They keep the same limb for years, Ed. Years. But you? No. One month, Ed. You had that brand new arm and leg for one month! ONE MONTH, EDWARD ELRIC!"

Under normal circumstances, he would have probably said something like, "Hey, I'm paying for it, aren't I? So quit fussing." Or "It's not my fault that that whack job psychopath took it from me!"

However, Edward knew it was his fault. He knew he could have died. He'd been naive, reckless, and immature, and, as a result, Edward's limbs had been taken and Winry's good work had gone to waste yet again.

So he caved, and simply apologized, hoping she would forgive him like she always did in the end. "Sorry…"

Winry grew silent.

"Hey, what's with you...?" Winry asked in concern.

"It's nothing..." Edward mumbled.

"Brother has been going through a lot over the past month, Winry. It's probably best to not fuss at him so much..." Alphonse whispered, placing a hand on her shoulder.

"She's right, Al. I have nobody to blame but myself for this... I was one who put myself in the position to get it taken. She has every right to be angry..." Edward muttered, having heard every word.

"But, Brother-"

"I disagree." Ling said. "It's true that you didn't really think things through, but you can't be blamed for what that serial killer did to you."

"Serial killer?!" Winry's eyes widened. That explained everything. This wasn't just some run-of-the-mill bad guy Edward had picked a fight with. It was a full blown madman.

"Ling, you idiot, nobody asked you to tell her about it!" Edward glared at him.

"*You're* the *idiot*, Ed!" Winry snapped. How was she supposed to have known *anything* about all this? "You're always going off and doing dangerous things and then never talk to *me* about anything. For starters, you should have told me if you needed replacement limbs. As it is, I don't even have the appropriate materials to work with right now. I guess I'll have to come back tomorrow."

...

The next day, Winry had come back as promised and provided Edward with a temporary leg to help Edward at least get around the house in the meantime. It was better than the crutch that had been provided to him by Roy and Riza, at the very least.

As he always did, Edward kept coming in to check on the progress of her work, only to get pushed out of the study she was working in, before Winry finally shut the door in his face. Occasionally, Winry would take measurements of his arm and leg.

"Brother, you need to try to relax. I'm sure she'll be done soon." Alphonse finally said, noticing his Brother's turmoil as he entered the room for the umpteenth time that day.

"I can't just relax." Edward moaned, wallowing on the bed. "It feels like it's taking forever..."

Alphonse sighed, or would be if he had a body.

...

The same day Winry did the measurements, she had seen Edward's cuts. She wasn't surprised, of course, but it pained her to know that her childhood friend had felt like things were so bad that he needed to use such an outlet to deal with it all.

More than anything, she just wanted to hug him and cry over his shoulder because he wouldn't cry for himself, but she told herself she needed to be strong for him and forced herself to push through, at least until Edward had his automail back.

...

Finally, it came time for Winry to get the automail connected to Edward's nerves, which of course was as painful and *enjoyable* as ever.

Once it was done, Edward was left lying in the guest bedroom in pain.

"Oh, don't be such a baby. It can't be *that* bad..." Winry teased, sitting beside him. Of course, she knew that automail could actually be very painful to reconnect, but she just liked jabbing at him sometimes. Alphonse was off in the other room speaking to Roy and Riza about something.

"Easy for you to say. *You* try getting your nerves reconnected again..." Edward muttered snidely.

"...I saw some of your cuts when I was doing your measurements..." Winry's voice trailed off into silence. Edward's eyes widened and he immediately looked away, his bangs falling in front of his eyes.

"I'd hoped you would never find out about them..." He mumbled.

"Why...?" Winry wanted to know.

"Why *what*?" Edward didn't know what she was referring to.

"Why do you do it...?" Winry clarified, meeting his eyes again. In her voice, he could tell that she was on the verge of tears.

Suddenly, he felt worse and more guilty than ever.

"Please don't cry, Winry..." he wanted to say, but the words wouldn't come, even as tears fell from her eyes that she desperately tried to stop.

Edward was silent for a long moment. How could he answer her question? Distraction? Control? Escape? None of them seemed right anymore. None of them seemed like a valid reason to make Winry and the others suffer so much. "I don't know..."

And it was true... Anymore, he *didn't* know why he cut himself. In fact, in this moment, he hated the blade and what it had turned him into. He began to hate what he'd been doing to himself.

He had so much potential, a life ahead of him. Everybody was counting on him, waiting for him to get better, even Winry now. Alphonse needed his body, he needed his strong older brother back. Edward refused to continue wasting his life on this. He couldn't risk killing himself and leaving everybody else behind. Even if he didn't see worth in himself, Mustang saw it. Ling saw it. Everybody of value in his life saw it, even ones like Ross and Major Armstrong.

Furthermore, Roy wasn't the type that would tell him to give himself more credit unless he meant it.

And Ling was blunt, so he knew what lied ahead of him, but *never again*, he told himself.

Never again would he make his friends suffer because of *this*. Edward got up moving, beside her.

"I'm so sorry, Winry..." He said, wrapping, an arm around her shoulder, and pulling her in for an embrace.

"What are you saying sorry for, Ed...? You're the one who's suffering, idiot..." Winry gazed over at him.

"No, I've made you cry again... You deserve better than that..."

...

A/N: Well, this definitely turned out optimistic at the end. Unfortunately, temptation will be there still, so he will likely have some relapses, but he's finally reached a point that he does genuinely wants to stop. And it's all thanks to Winry and his friends).

Next chapter will be another special one. :3

A Birthday To Remember

Story: It Is What It Is, Chapter 23
Disclaimer: I don't own FMA

...

"Can I... um... talk to you two about something?"

Roy and Riza turned to face Alphonse, who was standing behind them sheepishly.

"Oh, hey, Alphonse, what's up?" Roy inquired.

"Well, it's about Brother... I think I finally understand part of the reason he's been cutting himself." Alphonse murmured.

Neither Riza nor Roy said anything, but they waited for him to continue.

"I think he's afraid of us leaving him... When Dad left, Brother reacted to it even worse than I did. He says he hates him for leaving mom, but I think there's more to it than that. Now he refuses to even acknowledge him as our father anymore and it's possible he's cutting partially to escape from his attachment issues towards others."

"A fear of abandonment...?" Riza mused, inquisitively.

"That would actually make some sense..." Roy said, remembering how adamant and scared Edward had been of Alphonse being mad at him, as well as how Edward seemed so troubled when he thought he blamed him for Hughes' death. Nobody liked the prospect of being *disliked*, but Edward almost seemed to have built a codependency on Alphonse's and other people's approval, even Ling now.

"Maybe we could do something special for him, sir." Riza suggested.

"Well, his birthday *is* coming up soon, if I recall correctly." Roy thought back to his records on Edward.

"Yes, it is." Alphonse confirmed, just then remembering it himself. "Oh, that reminds me, there was a stew that Aunt Pinako used to make for us all the time. Ed loved it. We could ask Winry for the recipe, so maybe you and her could make it, Ms. Riza."

"Did somebody say birthday?" Ling's voice startled all of them once again, before Riza had the chance to speak up, as he popped out of nowhere. "Maybe I can help."

...

"Grandma's stew? Yeah, I know the recipe. Why?" Winry said.

"Great!" Alphonse would be smiling if he had a body. "Then that'll work out perfect."

"What will?" Winry asked, all to confused by Alphonse's chipper mood.

"Well, you see, we were thinking of preparing stew for Ed's birthday, so I was wondering if you would be willing to help Ms. Riza prepare it." Alphonse said.

"Oh, I almost forgot about that...! I'm sure he'll love it." Winry smiled, excitedly. "Alright, I'll help."

...

Edward knew that something was up.

He just *knew* it.

There would be times where Winry and Alphonse were talking or even Roy and Riza and then when he approached them they grew silent and just plain acted suspicious(at least in his mind). They were clearly hiding something.

Were they thinking of shipping him off to some hospital or something? That was the last thing he wanted, and he'd probably just use alchemy to get out. Besides, he hadn't cut in the last few weeks, so why would they be still acting bouncy over that?

It must have been something else. Of course, he couldn't bring himself to ask.

...

"What's so important that you that you had to drag me out of bed for, Winry?" Edward grumbled. Come to think of it, she'd been coming over a lot lately.

"Oh, be quiet, Ed. It's after 6, you needed to get up anyway." Winry chastised, as she led him into the kitchen.

Edward opened his mouth to speak, but was cut off by the smell of a concoction of beef and vegetables. Not just any, either. It was the same unmistakable smell of the stew that Pinako used to make. His eyes widened a bit when he stepped into the kitchen to see Ling, Roy, Riza, and Alphonse sitting at the table with a pot of, sure enough, beef stew in the middle.

"Ah, happy birthday, Fullmetal." Roy was the first one to speak, soon after followed by the others.

"Yeah, happy birthday, Ed." Winry smiled, causing Edward to blush a bit. He was left speechless.

They weren't ignoring him, after all... They...

"Ed, I got you a gift." Ling said, holding out a small gift box wrapped in red.

"Oh, thanks, Ling..." Edward seemed uncertain how to respond, but took the gift, knowing it was only appropriate to use both hands, in respect for Ling's cultural background.

"Don't mention it. And it's kind of from everybody, just for the record." Ling smiled, before returning to his seat.

"Now, come on, Ed. Let's go sit down to eat." Winry pulled Edward towards a chair.

"Okay, okay, I'm coming. Quit pulling me." Edward suddenly felt like there was a lump in his throat when he sat down.

"Sixteen, huh?" Roy smirked. "You're old enough to drive *and* drink now, kid."

"Just don't do what Roy did when he turned sixteen." Riza deadpanned. "He came in and fell flat on his face drunk."

"You sure have a knack for bringing up my worst mistakes, don't you...?" Roy murmured.

Edward burst out laughing at the image of Roy passed out on the floor.

"I'm just stating the facts, sir." Riza said simply.

"Can we eat now? I'm starved...!" Ling begged.

"Since Ed's here now, I don't see a problem with it." Riza said.

"Oh, man. This smells delicious." Ling began to use the large spoon in the pot to get a share of it for himself, putting in on the bowl that had been placed in front of him.

Edward sighed, deciding to not scold Ling for once over his obsession with food.

...

Once everybody started eating, Edward took a bite of his, the taste filling him with nostalgia immediately. All this time, he had tried to claim that he had no family aside from Alphonse, but... that wasn't true. He did have a family, right here.

"Brother, are you... crying...?"

Edward looked up at Alphonse, his sight blurring. "Am I...?"

He wiped his eyes. "I guess I am..."

"Hey, what's wrong?" Ling asked, worried. Out of all of the years most of them had known Edward, he never cried.

"Edward?" Winry inquired.

"It's nothing..." Edward said in a choked voice, before smiling. "I'm just happy. Thank you, guys."

...

"You like Winry, don't you?" Ling asked later that night, causing Edward to choke on the water he was drinking. They were on the porch.

"Like who? Who? Me? No way, we're just friends!" He insisted, a blush covering his face immediately.

"You're a terrible liar, Ed." Ling saw through his facade. "I've seen the way you look at her."

Edward decided that he couldn't even hold it back anymore. "Let's say I did... It's not like it matters anyway, since she doesn't feel that way about me."

"Are you sure about that?" Ling rose an eyebrow.

Edward was silent, before looking down with a saddened smirk on her face. "Why would she...? I'm constantly screwing up her automail and making her cry. Meanwhile, she's so amazing. There was a woman over in Rush Valley who was pregnant. Even while everybody else was freaking out, Winry was the one who stood up, and helped the lady give birth to her child. She's pushed me and Al forward on more occasions than I can even remember... I would be a fool to not like her. But I don't *deserve* her... She's everything I'm not... Brilliant, strong, courageous, and even beautiful."

"Man, you sure put yourself down a lot, Ed." Ling said. "You should give yourself more credit."

Edward was silent for a long moment. "Mustang said the same thing..."

"Well, I think you should tell her how you feel. After all, you won't know how things will go unless you try it out." Ling told him.

"Maybe..." Edward murmured. "But what if it doesn't work out? What if she gets tired and leaves me...? I worry about that a lot."

In truth, Edward knew that, on top of all that, he wasn't in any place of his life to make such a decision to begin with.

"Worry about *what* a lot?" Winry's voice caused him to stiffen.

"Oh, Winry, it's nothing!" Edward jumped back. "W-we were just talking about getting Alphonse's body back! I worry a lot about not being able to." Edward insisted, feeling worse than ever for using Alphonse's lack of body as a scapegoat.

Fortunately, she seemed to buy it.

...

It wasn't until later that Edward opened the gift that Ling had given him.

It was a jade pendant.

Alongside it was a note that said:

In Xingese culture, Jade represents virtues of courage, wisdom, modesty, justice and compassion. We hope it helps you.

Edward's eyes widened a bit, before smirking.

Maybe none of them had been that great with words, but receiving such a pendant meant just as much as words probably would have anyway.

...

A/N: I hope y'all enjoyed that... THIS WAS SO HARD TO WRITE.

And to answer your questions about the legal drinking age, i n some places of Europe, it's legal for 1six year olds to purchase alcohol.

Also, I know birthday cakes are traditional, but I felt Ed would take stew a lot more serious...

Also, as a note, I'm debating whether to keep going here for a little longer, or to do a time skip to some later point in the series, because it's not too long after this where we are that Ed and Al go to Briggs and stuff, and that Ling becomes Greed. Because this is presumably sometime from November - January.

I could end the story here, but I don't really think that would be a good choice. There's still so many ideas I have.

I do have one idea in specific to continue here. But I would like to hear everybody else's thoughts first. Because at this point there's several different directions I could go.

Author's Note

I would like to thank everybody who has been following and commenting on this story as well as for all the favs/kudos.

Instead of flat out ending this story, I have decided that I am going to write a sequel or two for this story, which may take a while, but I will let everybody know when it's done. Hopefully, that sequel will give everybody the proper closure everybody has been desiring. It WILL be very long more than likely, but it will be all in a single post, so, yeah, it could take up to several weeks or months before I complete it, depending on my schedule. But as of now, this section of the story will be finally marked as complete.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!